



**MERRIAM
PUBLIC ART AND PLACEMAKING
MASTER PLAN**

2024



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**“I LOVE THIS NEIGHBORHOOD AND I LOVE THE
COMMUNITY! LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING
HOW MUCH MORE BEAUTIFUL IT BECOMES.”**

- Merriam Public Art Survey Respondent



INTRODUCTION

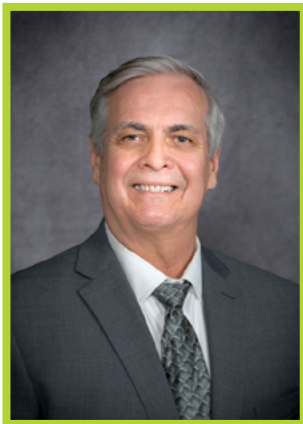
We are excited to introduce the **2024 Merriam Public Art and Placemaking Master Plan!**

In 2023, City Councilmembers voted to invest \$550,000 over five years for public art across Merriam. We made it a priority to not only beautify our city but to create engagement with our residents and build identity in Merriam.

But what type of art did our community want? Murals, sculptures, a light installation, or something else? The city reengaged its Public Art Committee, which hired Julia Dixon, a creative economy consultant, to lead this initiative and create a public art master plan.

Throughout the past year, we have conducted more than 20 interviews, held an open house, and had more than 350 community members participate in a detailed survey. From this, we defined what our residents think about current and future public art in Merriam.

We are now ready to share this plan with you. Explore how we determined what type of public art our community wants. Learn how we'll implement the *Merriam Public Art and Placemaking Master Plan* to continue supporting art in the future.



Bob Pape

Bob Pape

Mayor, City of Merriam

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Master Plan at a Glance

What are the goals of the plan?

The goals of the *Merriam Public Art and Placemaking Master Plan* are to foster place-based pride, rejuvenate and enliven public spaces, and create a more engaged community through public art.

Should a Public Art Committee ordinance be created?

Yes. This ensures the committee is protected from politics, funding shortages, and other conditions. Codifying Merriam's Public Art Committee with its own ordinance also provides an opportunity to improve and formalize committee structure. Recommend changes to the committee include:

1. Instead of publicizing a call for volunteers to serve on the Public Art Committee, we recommend the mayor appoint and the City Council approve members. This will ensure that certain seats are filled by vetted and qualified individuals with specific expertise, as well as a committee that reflects diversity of thought, perspective, ability, and opinion.
2. Appoint an odd number of members to prevent tied votes.

Should the Public Art Committee commission artists, release solicitations, and/or accept unsolicited applications?

It is recommended that the committee focus its work over the next five years on releasing solicitations that promote public art opportunities to a wide range of local, regional, and national artists and arts facilitators. This process strikes a balance between quality and community engagement.

How much does the new public art process differ from Merriam's past public art process?

We recommend a similar process to that which the first Public Art Committee utilized, with three important differences:

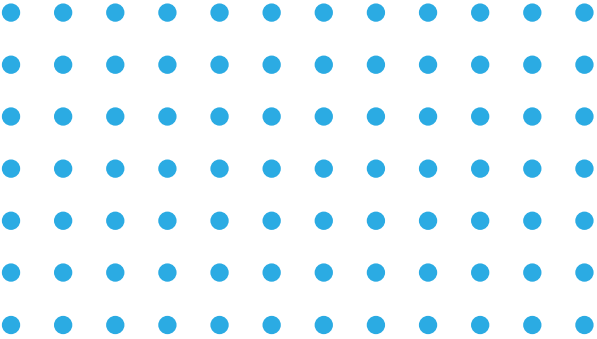
1. At least one specific, objective placemaking outcome per project should be identified during the planning process and used as a criterion when jurying applications. For example: a bus shelter on Johnson Drive could be connected with a health and safety and/or beautification outcome, an installation at the north end of Merriam Drive could be connected with a wayfinding and/or history outcome, or a sculpture north of Chatlain Park could be connected with a city identity and/or tourism outcome. All proposals should demonstrate how the artwork meets each outcome.
2. As the program grows, instead of using a consultant and existing staff to support the work of the committee in addition to their other duties, it is recommended that the city hire a dedicated coordinator with arts management experience to facilitate the public art program. This position, which would provide all services expected of past consultants **and** city staff, would embed an arts advocate in City Hall, allow for long-term public art planning.
3. More communication and involvement with the City Council, including presenting Councilmembers with an annual public art work plan, year-end report, and public art project plans.

Should the Public Art Committee fund large or small art projects?

It depends. What is more important is that each project is aligned with a specific placemaking outcome, the scale of the artwork is appropriate for the site, and the project budget is proportionate with the artwork’s materials, scale, fabrication, and installation.

Should the Public Art Committee fund permanent or temporary art projects?

It depends. What is more important is that each project is aligned with a specific placemaking outcome, every exhibiting artist provides a detailed maintenance plan, whether the artwork is temporary or permanent, and the lifespan of any temporary artwork as well as that artwork’s deinstallation plan is clearly stated in the artist’s contract.

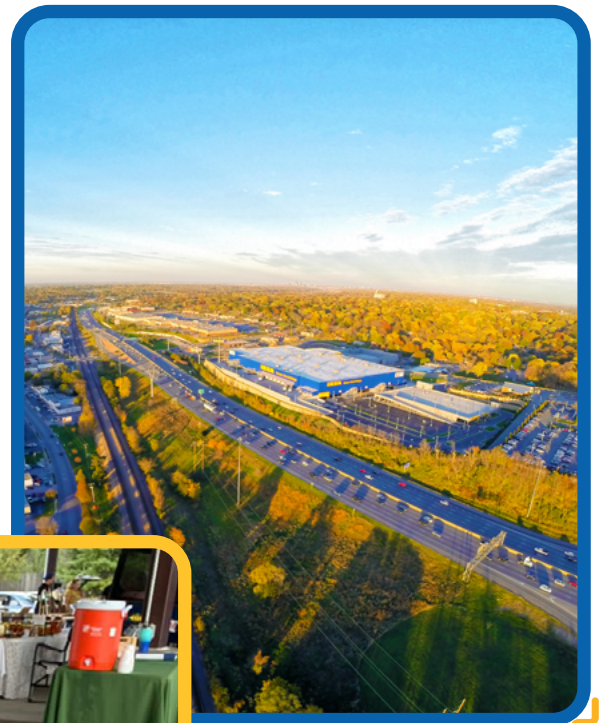


Background

Merriam, Kansas, is both bustling and serene. Occupying a four-square-mile sliver of northeast Johnson County, it is one of many communities comprising the Kansas City metropolitan area. In fact, downtown Kansas City, Missouri, is a short 15-minute drive up Interstate 35 (I-35). This north/south highway, which runs parallel to Turkey Creek, is, in a way, the beating heart of Merriam; its five intersections are some of the busiest in the county, with the Shawnee Mission Parkway interchange seeing nearly 40,000 vehicles daily.

Several retail centers contribute to Merriam's steady traffic flow. Merriam Town Center, a shopping mall built in 1998, is anchored by big box chains including The Home Depot, Marshalls, OfficeMax, PetSmart, DICK'S Sporting Goods, and Gamescape by Cinemark. Just south of Merriam Town Center lies Merriam Village, another commercial center featuring Ikea—a major destination retailer and the only such store between St. Louis and Denver, likely serving customers from Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa, and Oklahoma. Merriam's retail economy, as well as AdventHealth Shawnee Mission medical center in southeast Merriam, attracts workers from outside the city limits.

With a fairly dense but modest population size of about 11,000 residents, the majority of the city is comprised of about two dozen quiet, tree-lined residential neighborhoods. These neighborhoods provide calm refuge from the drone of the highway and scurry of shoppers. The residents in these neighborhoods are primarily commuters—about 55% work elsewhere—and a large portion are school-aged (17.3%) and over 65 years old (17%).



Creative Placemaking

The concept of placemaking was described as an alternative philosophy to 1950s urban renewal by Jane Jacobs, a New York City-based writer and activist, in her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). Jacobs did not coin the term, but she articulated the importance of dynamic and productive urban places that prioritized residents' relationships with space over economics of space.

Then, in his book *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), American economist Richard Florida highlighted and elaborated on the intellectual richness and exchange of ideas that made Jacobs' Greenwich Village neighborhood so vibrant. This rumination on creative work and quality of place spurred arts organizations like the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to invest in understanding how arts and culture, not city planning and engineering, can transform a place.

Creative placemaking was first defined by Ann Markusen, an economist, and Anne Gadwa, an artist and urban planner, in their 2010 white paper for The Mayors' Institute on City Design and the NEA. "For two decades, American cities, suburbs, and small towns have struggled with structural change and residential uprooting," they wrote. "Yet revitalization has come from an unexpected quarter." Markusen and Gadwa described creative placemaking as arts and cultural partnerships that strategically shape the physical and social character of a place, with the goal of improving livability, diversity, sustainability, and economic development outcomes.

Public officials and others in Merriam were inspired to articulate and develop a more concrete sense of place within their city through the arts. According to freelance journalist Roxie Hammill:

Merriam's foray into placemaking started with former city councilman Todd Boyer, who began promoting the idea after learning about it at a League of Cities conference, said [Phil] Lammers. The council went along with the idea and put [public art funding] in the 2015 budget, with the idea of keeping it going for the next five years if possible with more public art, he said. They reasoned that it was time for the city to turn some attention to public art, he said.

- [The Kansas City Star](#), February 3, 2015

The term creative placemaking became popularized nationally, thanks in large part to a decade-long funding and research project called [Artplace America](#), and the concept was—and still is, according to many public art planning interviewees—embraced by many in Merriam.



Public Art in Merriam

Merriam officials chose to invest in public art, specifically, as a means to achieve placemaking goals. An ad hoc committee was formed in 2014 to develop a process for allocating the city's \$500,000 public art budget over a five-year period, and an independent curator, James Martin, was hired to both guide the work of the committee and make creative recommendations.

The first artwork — a collaboration between Dan Maginn, principal at DRAW Architecture + Urban Design in Kansas City, and Paul Rudy, a professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City — was installed at the intersection of Johnson Drive and Merriam Drive in 2016. The piece, “Still Time,” is aesthetically subtle but conceptually complex. As [reported](#) by Laura Spencer for KCUR Kansas City Public Radio:

The intersection, says Maginn, is a place where people are in a hurry. But he says the design team chose not to focus on the traffic. Instead, they tapped into something older: the serenity of nearby Turkey Creek, lined with blocks of limestone, the sense of quiet, and the occasional gust of wind. Now at the center of the site is a 16-foot-tall limestone tower with a wind chime...Maginn says they hope someone walking by might consider slowing down, sitting on one of the limestone blocks in the park, and stopping for a moment — in this place — to listen.

The second artwork, “Planting the Seeds” by Colorado Springs-based sculptor Christopher Weed, was installed in 2017 at the entrance to the Merriam Marketplace on Merriam Drive. The three polished stainless-steel spheres with towering stems make reference to spores, sprouts, or fruit, reflecting the nature of the site — the Merriam Marketplace is home to the city's farmers' market and serves as an access point to Werner Park and the Turkey Creek Streamway Trail. The installation also pays homage to pop art sculpture of the mid-twentieth century. An avid sculpture fan may see a bit of Claes Oldenburg's “Spoonbridge and Cherry” and Anish Kapoor's “Cloud Gate” (affectionately known to Chicagoans as “The Bean”) in the work.

In 2018, the committee identified Waterfall Park as the next site for a public artwork. After a rigorous process, Colorado-based artist Joshua Wiener's sculpture “Hmmm...” was installed at the edge of the park along Merriam Drive the following year. The piece depicts a stone caterpillar facing a cairn of river boulders upon which an aluminum butterfly is perched. “To me, it was something that drew a sense of vitality, something vivacious that stirred curiosity and wonder,” Wiener told [The Kansas City Star](#). “The piece is site-specific. The context drove the design.”

Construction of a new, state-of-the-art community center began in 2018, and the committee decided to invest its remaining funds on a large-scale artwork at the site. Ohio-based firm Designing Local was chosen as the art consultant, and artist Blessing Hancock of Tucson, Arizona, was awarded the public art contract in June 2019. Hancock's process was more participatory than previous awardees. She engaged the community in identifying words that reflected Merriam's values, which were incorporated into two freestanding stainless-steel sculptures in the Merriam Community Center courtyard. She also created a large aluminum “wall mounted starburst” that is affixed to the side of a nearby parking garage. All three sculptures have a lighting component, which can change colors as desired.

Other public artworks in Merriam's collection include “Motherhood,” a water fountain and bronze sculpture of bears by artist Kwan Wu, formerly of Olathe, installed at the Merriam Historic Plaza; “Seasons of Historic Merriam,” a mural by the late Shawnee resident and artist Charles Goslin on view at Merriam City Hall; and two paintings at the Merriam Community Center: “Celebration” by artist Michael Walsh of Mission, Kansas, and a mural of downtown Merriam circa 1940 by Michael Young of Kansas City.

Public Art Inventory



Past Public Art Procurement Process

The 2014 Public Art Committee utilized paid consultants who worked with a city staff liaison to write and distribute calls for art, requests for proposals (RFPs), and requests for qualifications (RFQs); vet applications and proposals; recommend artist finalists; and support the contracting, fabrication, and installation of public artworks. Each process began with the committee selecting a city-owned site and a project budget cap. Then, a solicitation was created which, once approved by the committee, was circulated widely. If an RFQ process was utilized, a small number of finalists were invited to submit a detailed, site-specific, fully realized public art proposal, supported by a \$1,200 stipend.

After the committee voted on a winning proposal, it made a formal recommendation to the City Council, who then considered, gave feedback on, and voted to consider the proposal. Upon approval, a city attorney drew up an art purchase contract or a public art agreement requiring, among other things, a fabrication plan and maintenance plan. The contract was then sent to the artist by the city staff liaison and signed by the artist and the mayor. Finally, the contract was executed by the artist, with the consultant and city staff liaison providing oversight.

Once installed, Public Works was—and remains—responsible for property maintenance. The department also handles the cleaning of “Still Time” but contracts the cleaning and maintenance of “Planting the Seeds” and “Hmmm...” to third-party specialists. Artist Blessing Hancock requires ART Research Enterprises, Inc. be used for significant maintenance or repairs to “Bask.”

The Public Art Committee disbanded following the installation of “Bask” in 2020 but reconvened with a majority of new members in April 2023. Once again, the City Council allocated \$115,000 per year for five years to fund the acquisition of public artworks through the Capital Improvement Program budget but requested that staff seek a private funding source to enhance the city’s investment in the committee’s activities. In response, a percent for art ordinance was drafted.

The most common type of funding for municipal public art projects is a percent for art ordinance. In general, a percent for art policy requires any developer of a certain-sized capital improvement project to set aside a pre-determined percentage of their project budget to either invest in public art on the project site or contribute to a city-managed Public Art Fund.

Merriam’s draft percent for art ordinance is an important step in codifying the city’s public art program, formalizing components of the selection and approval process, and ensuring the program has a sustainable funding source. The draft ordinance establishes a Public Art Impact Fee, which is likely to be 1% of the valuation of commercial and multi-family development projects submitted to the Planning Commission. It also establishes a Public Art Fund, a separate fund which will hold a developer’s Public Art Impact Fee if the developer chooses not to place a public artwork on the project property or does not spend the full Public Art Impact Fee on their artwork. Additionally, the draft articulates the importance of public art to the City of Merriam, ensures that the Public Art Committee review the developer’s proposed artwork before presentation before the City Council, and establishes critical definitions of “artwork” and “public art.”

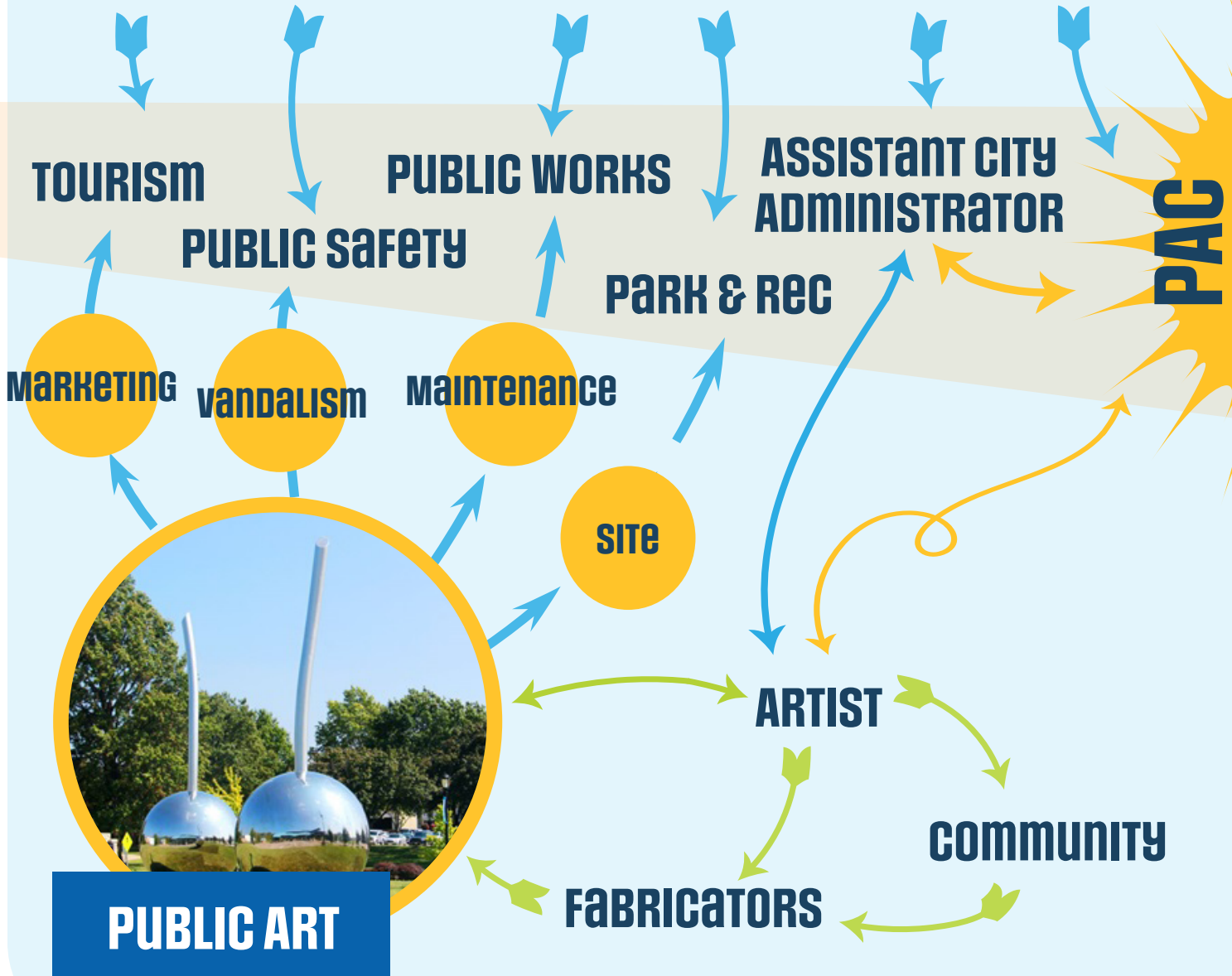
Even though funding for more public art is in place, the 2023 Public Art Committee opted to first create a strategic master plan to direct future art acquisitions and identify key sites for public art across Merriam. The committee, with assistance from the city staff liaison, drafted an RFP to hire a public art planning consultant for no more than \$29,500, which stipulated significant community engagement and outreach to a diverse range of stakeholders.

MAYOR



CITY COUNCIL

ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET



PUBLIC ART PLANNING

Methodology

The planning process was a 10-month period of intense research and analysis employing Design Thinking. Design Thinking, or “human-centered design,” is a methodology rooted in creative practice that artists, educators, planners, entrepreneurs, executive directors, and others use to develop practical solutions to specific problems. The five steps—empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test—place emphasis on understanding stakeholder needs through extensive research and community engagement as well as exploring potential solutions by generating and evaluating many ideas.

This planning process was divided into five phases based on the Design Thinking model:

Phase 1: Research and Review

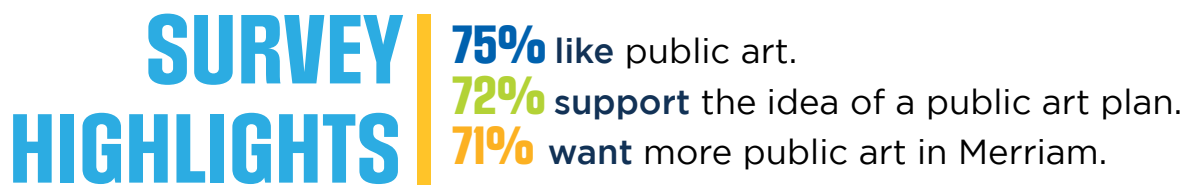
September 2023

The initial phase focused on preliminary research to develop a contextualized understanding of Merriam and its cultural history. The consulting team collected and reviewed city plans, historical documents related to the installation of public artworks, county public art plans, and past Public Art Committee minutes (see [page 76](#) for a select list of supporting literature). With the committee’s assistance, 33 key stakeholders and over 75 regional artists were identified.

Phase 2: Data Collection

September - November 2023

The second phase was a three-month-long period of extensive data collection. Informational data included a comprehensive analysis of city demographics, city-owned properties and parcels, and the *Merriam Comprehensive Plan 2040: Existing Conditions Report* as well as a two-day in-person tour of Merriam and its public artworks. Qualitative data were sourced from one-on-one interviews with 21 stakeholders—11 of which were conducted in person—and a small artist focus group. In addition to this targeted data collection, a public survey was distributed online that assessed engagement with and the impact of public art in Merriam. 354 individuals completed the 20-question survey, which collected responses from October 5–27, 2023. Information from all sources was compiled into a 66-page interim report, which served as the foundation for the plan’s recommendations.



Phase 3: Information Synthesis and Feedback

December - January 2023

After a plan outline was created, the client and consultant held an in-person public open house to receive community feedback on key topics. Over 35 people attended the event and provided valuable input on 16 important questions related to future public art locations and types, Public Art Committee guidelines, funding sources and expenditures, and public art procurement guidelines. Through guided discussion, the Public Art Committee then defined and articulated its mission, or purpose; vision, or aspirations; and values, or guiding philosophies.

Phase 4: Drafting

January - April 2024

In Phase 4, priorities and strategies began to emerge through the synthesis of data and open house feedback with various city plan recommendations as well as comparative analysis of public art and placemaking projects in similar-sized communities across the United States.

Phase 5: Refinement, Publication, and Adoption

May - June 2024

The final phase of the process was the refinement and design of the *Public Art and Placemaking Master Plan*. Graphics, maps, templates, and resource lists were created, and photographs were gathered.

Although there may be some overlap between those who participated in interviews, the survey, and the open house, it is safe to say that over 450 individuals engaged themselves in the public art planning process. This is a testament to the passion that Merriam residents feel about public art, as well as their interest in seeing arts and culture in the city thrive.

BY THE NUMBERS

354 SURVEY RESPONDENTS

129 MAILING LIST SIGN-UPS

40 DOCUMENTS/ARTICLES

35 OPEN HOUSE ATTENDEES

23 INTERVIEWS

11 CITY REPORTS

Findings from Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the public art planning process identified several strengths and challenges that informed the plan's recommendations. It is important to understand and contextualize these findings in relationship to arts and culture so that each public art project is intentional and successful.

Challenges

Perception

One of the biggest challenges uncovered in this planning process involved the perception of public art. Interviewees speculated that some residents feel that public art is a waste of taxpayer money, and 7% of all public art survey respondents explicitly corroborated this sentiment.

But what would residents like their taxes to fund?

According to the *2024 Merriam Community Survey*, 93% of resident respondents were satisfied with the quality of city services, from road maintenance to public safety. 80% of respondents were satisfied with Merriam's value for tax dollars and fees, up seven percentage points from the previous community survey administered in 2021, and Merriam residents were more than twice as likely to be satisfied with Merriam's value for tax dollars and fees than residents of other American communities on average.

2024 Merriam Community Survey respondents were presented with five different community issues the city was considering at the time. Those issues were:

1. Merriam should continue to support a public art program.
2. Merriam should continue to allow the open burning of yard waste and leaves.
3. Merriam should invest additional dollars in providing on-street bike lanes on major streets.
4. Merriam should focus on the revitalization and redevelopment of the downtown corridor between Johnson Drive and 55th Street.
5. Merriam should try to bring a grocery store to town even if it requires giving the store a multi-million dollar public incentive package.

The top two statements survey respondents most agreed with were, "Merriam should move in the direction of a future downtown that is considerably different than present downtown," and "Merriam should continue to support a public art program." However, when asked to prioritize all five issues, a public art program was ranked as the lowest priority. Respondents ranked incentivizing a grocery store as the highest priority initiative for the city.

We received additional information about Merriam residents' priorities in our public art feedback survey administered in October 2023. Some responses to the survey question, "Do you have any other comments about Merriam's current public art, future public art, public art process, or other issues related to a city-wide public art master plan?" directly pertained to redirecting the public art budget to address other issues, including:

- business recruitment/grocery store/restaurants
- flood control
- historic building renovation/restoration
- infrastructure/railroad bridge/pedestrian bridge over I-35
- neighborhood improvements
- parks and trails
- public safety including police and fire departments
- supporting the elderly

Further contextualizing this challenge is our survey finding that public art was much more important to a community's beautification, community identity, and arts and culture than tourism, civic engagement, and economic development.

Aspect of life	Important	Not important
Beautification	75.7%	10.5%
Community identity	69.5%	13.8%
Arts and culture	67.0%	16.2%
Quality of life	65.5%	16.7%
Education	63.0%	18.4%
Tourism	58.7%	18.6%
Civic Engagement	54.5%	20.3%
Economic Development	48.6%	23.4%

Total important is percentage of all respondents who selected the answer choices “extremely important” and “very important”. Total not important is percentage of all respondents who selected the answer choices “slightly important” and “not important”.

Public art, by its very nature, advances arts and culture and, as a predominately visual medium, it can certainly make a building, park, underpass, or street more aesthetically attractive. But these survey results suggest that may install an artwork to simply display something beautiful, or they may use public artworks as a tool to achieve other outcomes.

Engagement

Another challenge is the frequency and quality of engagement with Merriam’s current public art. According to our survey results, over half (51.8%) of all respondents engaged with the city’s eight public artworks either a few times a year or not at all. When we isolated the results of engagement with the four artworks commissioned between 2016 and 2020, there was an increase in the rate of engagement as well as a decrease in unawareness of these artworks, but nearly half (47%) of all respondents had infrequent or no engagement with these pieces.

All Eight Artworks

Rate of Engagement	Count	Percentage
Daily	188	6.9%
Weekly	370	13.6%
Monthly	303	11.1%
A few times a year	776	28.5%
Never	633	23.3%
I don’t know what this is	451	16.6%



“Still Time,” “Planting the Seeds,” “Hmmm...,” “Bask”

Rate of Engagement	Count	Percentage
Daily	126	9.2%
Weekly	244	17.8%
Monthly	180	13.1%
A few times a year	387	28.2%
Never	258	18.8%
I don’t know what this is	175	12.8%

Several factors that may have influenced the higher rate of engagement with and awareness of “Still Time,” “Planting the Seeds,” “Hmmm...,” and “Bask” are their presence in highly trafficked locations, their nature as sculptures that can be approached and touched, press coverage both during and after their installation, and word-of-mouth awareness through the Public Art Committee.

Still, it is important to address the differences between active and passive engagement in this plan. The Merriam Visitors Bureau does an excellent job incorporating the city’s public artworks into its marketing materials, including the *Merriam Community & Visitor Guide*, exploremerriam.com, social media, postcards, and other advertisements. However, engagement that is **encouraged** is passive. The marketing and promotion of Merriam’s public art collection is an important implementation strategy (see [page 61](#) for details), but an equal amount of effort should be made to proactively engage residents and visitors with the collection.

Engagement that is **programmed** is active. The various events that occur at Merriam Marketplace are somewhat active, due only to the strategic positioning of “Planting the Seeds” by the facility’s entrance. Similarly, Concert in the Courtyard, an annual summertime live music performance, takes place just feet from “Bask” on the Merriam Community Center outdoor patio. However, these activities do not engage the artworks directly. Active public art engagement strategies may include performances, youth artmaking, dinners, and other events that take place in front of, are thematic to, and involve static public artworks; adding functional public artworks to the collection; and developing a social practice public art series in which artists themselves engage community members in publicly accessible spaces such as neighborhood streets, empty storefronts, playgrounds, and parking lots.

Passive engagement is less costly but not as impactful. Conversely, active engagement comes at a higher cost in terms of planning time, energy, and expense, but reaps higher rewards. In analyzing our public art survey data, we found a direct correlation between rate of engagement and public art impact. In general, the more respondents engaged with a piece of public art, the more important they felt public art is to various aspects of life. Additionally, we found that higher public art engagement directly correlates to a positive perception of public art.

Identity

Although public art was recognized as important to a community’s identity, Merriam is not necessarily identified by its public art. Ikea’s presence in the city, both as a popular retail destination as well as a visual landmark overlooking I-35, makes it synonymous with Merriam. Merriam is also known, positively and negatively, by residents and visitors alike, for its car culture. Most of the Merriam Drive corridor is dotted with car repair shops and used dealerships and, once Aristocrat Motors completes construction of its new Mercedes-Benz showroom, automotive dealerships will account for over one third of all indoor retail space in the city.

According to Merriam’s 2018 “Just Right” brand analysis conducted by Lynchpin Ideas, the city needed to improve its branding, marketing, wayfinding, and marketability. “People need to know there’s more here than just IKEA or buying a car,” said one respondent. While the *2024 Merriam Community Survey* identified a 77% satisfaction with the overall image of the city amongst residents, the *2021 Merriam Comprehensive Plan 2040* identified “an outside perception” of elevated crime rates in Merriam as well as “negative externalities associated with commercial/industrial land as it relates to traffic, noise,” and environmental issues such as pollution.

Through the placement of highly visible public artworks as well as active engagement with artists and public artworks, the city can transform its identity into a place known for arts and culture.

Strengths

Understanding the city’s strengths is crucial to developing public art projects that maximize placemaking outcomes. The 2018 “Just Right” brand analysis revealed that residents feel a great deal of ownership and pride in their city. Upon reviewing the brand report, we found that the city’s strengths fall into three distinct categories: people, character, and location.

People

The community is one of the city’s strongest assets. Residents were described as friendly, neighborly, and close-knit. Family, roots, and previous connection to the community were cited as reasons why respondents chose to move to and/or stay in Merriam, and diversity, inclusivity, and acceptance were cited as reasons why Merriam feels “Just Right.”

U.S. Census data support these anecdotes to some degree. The majority of Merriam’s housing units are owner-occupied single-family homes with at least three bedrooms, and more Merriam homeowners have occupied the same unit for at least ten years than those in Kansas City, Missouri; Johnson County; and the state of Kansas—giving Merriam residents more time to get to know their neighbors. While the plethora of multi-bedroom homes in Merriam suggests the city contains many families, this is actually not the case. Merriam has a smaller average household size and significantly less families than Kansas City, Missouri; Johnson County; and the state of Kansas, and many more Merriam householders live alone than in these comparative communities.

Community	10+ Year Home Ownership	Average Household Size	Households with Families	Households Living Alone
Merriam	40.9%	2.35	46.7%	44.7%
Kansas City, MO	27.2%	2.54	54.5%	35.4%
Johnson County	34.1%	2.69	67.4%	25.3%
Kansas	37.1%	2.61	63.9%	30.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: ACS 2021; retrieved March 13, 2024



Between 2000 and 2020, the number of young children in Merriam steadily declined (although the 15- to 19-year-old cohort increased by 22%), the city’s Millennial cohort is the only generation to have increased its population, and residents aged 55 and older increased by 34%. These population dynamics may provide some insight into community relationships and congeniality. Residents with children may seek each other out for connection and support. Millennials, a generation filled with passion and enthusiasm for philanthropy, may bring a youthful energy and generous spirit to the city. And residents who live alone may seek to engage their neighbors in a more meaningful way.

When looking at the numbers, Merriam seems much more economically diverse than racially diverse. As analysts, we define population trends by long-term change. For example, in the decade between 2012 and 2021, Merriam’s white population rose while the Black and Hispanic populations declined. This was confounding, as multiple interviewees described a “fast-growing Hispanic population” in Merriam. But when we isolated the post-pandemic years (2020-2022), we found that Merriam’s white population declined and Black, Hispanic, and indigenous populations rose. While Merriam is 82.6% white (as of 2022), the city is becoming more racially diverse. Whether or not this is a long-term trend remains to be seen.

Merriam’s Change in Racial Composition (2020-2022)	Percent Change
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	41.3%
Asian alone	-7.3%
Black or African American alone	10.3%
Hispanic or Latino	3.5%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	-
White alone	-4.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: ACS 2020-2022; retrieved March 14, 2024

Diversity in all forms—economic, ethnic, gender, generational, sexual, spiritual—is incredibly important to Merriam residents, and the city has been described as welcoming to all. The Shawnee Mission Islamic Education Center on England Street offers religious services and educational programs for the regional Muslim community, the Filipino Cultural Center in nearby Overland Park is the home base for the Filipino Cultural Center Foundation which provides events and education, and various places of worship create congregational community in Merriam.

The Merriam Community Center hosts a plethora of events for families and the community. Free city events such as the Turkey Creek Festival at Antioch Park, Merriam Drive Live at the Merriam Marketplace, Family Fun Fridays, and National Night Out engage residents of all ages and backgrounds in cultural and recreational activities. And in 2024, *Merriam Highlights & Recreation* magazine and the *Merriam Community & Visitor Guide* were made available in Spanish for the first time, providing wider access to city information, news, and events.

The City has also made efforts to codify its philosophy of inclusivity and acceptance. In 2019, the City Council unanimously approved a non-discrimination ordinance “that prohibits discrimination in the City of Merriam in employment, housing, and public accommodations on the basis of an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity” in addition to age, race, religion, color, sex, national origin or ancestry, disability, military status, genetic information, marital status, or familial status. In 2022, the City Council voted—again, unanimously—to pass a resolution opposing “all portrayals of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals as mentally ill due to their sexual orientation,” and condemning conversion therapy practiced on the LGBTQ community.



Character

Merriam’s character is incredibly appealing to those considering moving to or already living in the city. The 2018 “Just Right” brand analysis found Merriam to be a beautiful, affordable city that exudes small town charm. Residents described a safe, quiet, walkable city with excellent amenities and “strong infrastructure.”

The city’s commercial districts are located along its transportation corridors: I-35, Merriam Drive, Shawnee Mission Parkway, Johnson Drive, and 75th Street. The remainder of the city is comprised of 20 or so unique neighborhoods, each possessing its own name, aesthetic, and identity. Many of these neighborhoods contain curvilinear streets and cul-de-sacs which promote tranquility, security, and community—as opposed to a grid street pattern that promotes uniformity, movement, and connection. Adding to the city’s attractiveness are its rolling hills, well-maintained and eclectic single-family homes, and tree cover on neighborhood streets and residential properties. These qualities help to create Merriam’s “small town feel without being in a small town.”

The combination of diverse housing and older housing creates an atmosphere of affordability in Merriam, especially when contextualized within Johnson County and nearby Kansas City, Missouri. Merriam’s median home value is more than \$100,000 less than the median home value of neighboring Shawnee and Overland Park, as well as Johnson County as a whole. Kansas City’s median home value is also higher than Merriam’s, but its median household income is lower, alluding to Kansas City’s unaffordability. Merriam is the perfect location for those who want to live close to the city but can’t afford to live in other communities in Johnson County, which is [identified](#) as the 80th wealthiest county in the nation.

Community	Median Household Income	Median Home Value	Individuals Below Poverty Line	Families Below Poverty Line
Merriam	\$64,703	\$196,100	7.9%	4.3%
Shawnee	\$92,844	\$312,800	6.1%	1.8%
Overland Park	\$89,280	\$352,000	5.8%	2.2%
Johnson County	\$92,945	\$337,700	6.0%	3.9%
Kansas City, MO	\$63,396	\$213,400	13.4%	9.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: ACS 2021; retrieved March 13, 2024

Merriam’s outdoor amenities add a great deal to the character of the city. Seven neighborhood parks, over 75 acres in total, contain state-of-the-art playground structures, shelters, soccer fields, picnic tables, grills, and other features. The Turkey Creek Streamway Trail, described as “an urban Zen zone” by [Kansas City Hiker](#), is a 3.65-mile, 40-acre paved multi-use recreational trail that runs along Turkey Creek and includes “The Clearing,” an open space situated south of 67th Street that has been outfitted with benches, landscaping, and a butterfly garden. The Merriam Marketplace is a 10,000-square-foot covered pavilion and grounds that is home to the farmers’ market and several large outdoor community events. While the Merriam Marketplace is a centrally located green space, the city supports and encourages the growth of its neighborhoods through sprawling recreational infrastructure.

The Merriam Community Center is the city’s indoor recreational hub. A \$36 million investment funded by a voter-supported 10-year quarter-cent sales tax, the facility—which opened in 2020—contains an indoor and outdoor pool, gymnasium with suspended jogging track, fully equipped fitness center, event and education spaces, and the Tim Murphy Art Gallery. Complimenting this facility is the neighboring Merriam Plaza Library, a \$13.68 million, 15,000-square-foot county library that opened to the public in March 2024.

The Merriam Municipal Plaza is the city's administrative center. This parcel, located across the street from the community center and the library, contains Merriam City Hall, the fire station, and the Merriam Police Department. City Hall contains the municipal court, city council chambers, the mayor's office, and the majority of the city's administrative offices. The city also owns and maintains the Merriam Historic Plaza, a small roadside park with public art, a historical walking path, and an 18-year-old building home to the Merriam Visitors Bureau, as well as a public works facility on Knox Street.

These amenities are not only new or well-maintained, but they are accessible. According to a walk-time analysis published in the *Merriam Comprehensive Plan 2040*, 93.2% of all residential parcels are within a five- to 15-minute walk of any of these parks, plazas, and facilities.

Location

Merriam's amenities are not only accessible, but the city is a neighboring suburb of Kansas City, making its accessibility to city-based employment and recreation a critical asset. Respondents of the "Just Right" brand analysis described its "central" location and it being "close to work" as a reason why Merriam is just right. Said one respondent, "I can be on I-35 in two minutes, and anywhere in 15 [minutes]."

Kansas City, Missouri, is a major metropolitan center in the Midwest. With a population of over a half million people, it is the largest city between Indianapolis, Indiana, and Denver, Colorado. According to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (BLS), Kansas City, Missouri, contains 643,400 jobs, a significant portion of which are in the professional and business services, education and health services, government, and leisure and hospitality sectors. However, the trade, transportation, and utilities sector is the largest, employing 225,200 people thanks to the city's many corporate headquarters, including Evergy, Garmin, Hallmark Cards, Hostess Brands, Oracle Cerner, and T-Mobile.

The greater Kansas City metropolitan area, including Johnson County's 19 other cities, is even more populous with more than 2.2 million people. Encompassing 14 counties and over 8,000 square miles, the metro contains a plethora of employers, colleges, hospitals, shopping centers, and corporate offices.

As previously mentioned, the majority of Merriam residents work elsewhere. The city's affordability and charm coupled with its convenient location is amplified by its access to transportation systems. I-35, the highway that bifurcates Merriam, quickly connects commuters to a network of interstates, making regional employment throughout the metro and beyond incredibly accessible by car. Public transportation in the metro is comprised entirely of RideKC, a bus system, and routes 402 and 403 make stops in Merriam.

Merriam is also in close proximity to regional arts and cultural institutions. Kansas City Art Institute—a small yet renowned undergraduate art school, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, and Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art are all clustered in the Southmoreland neighborhood of Kansas City, Missouri, a 15-minute drive down Shawnee Mission Parkway. The Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art is a 10-minute drive south to the Johnson County Community College campus in Overland Park. Cultural resource organizations, including The Arts Council of Johnson County, InterUrban ArtHouse, Kansas City Artists Coalition, and ArtsKC are also nearby.

The proximity of Merriam to a community of regional artists; nearly 45,000 museum artworks and objects; and dozens of municipal public art programs, galleries, and artist studios position the city as the nexus of a critical mass of regional artistic activity.

PLACEMAKING GUIDELINES

Objectives

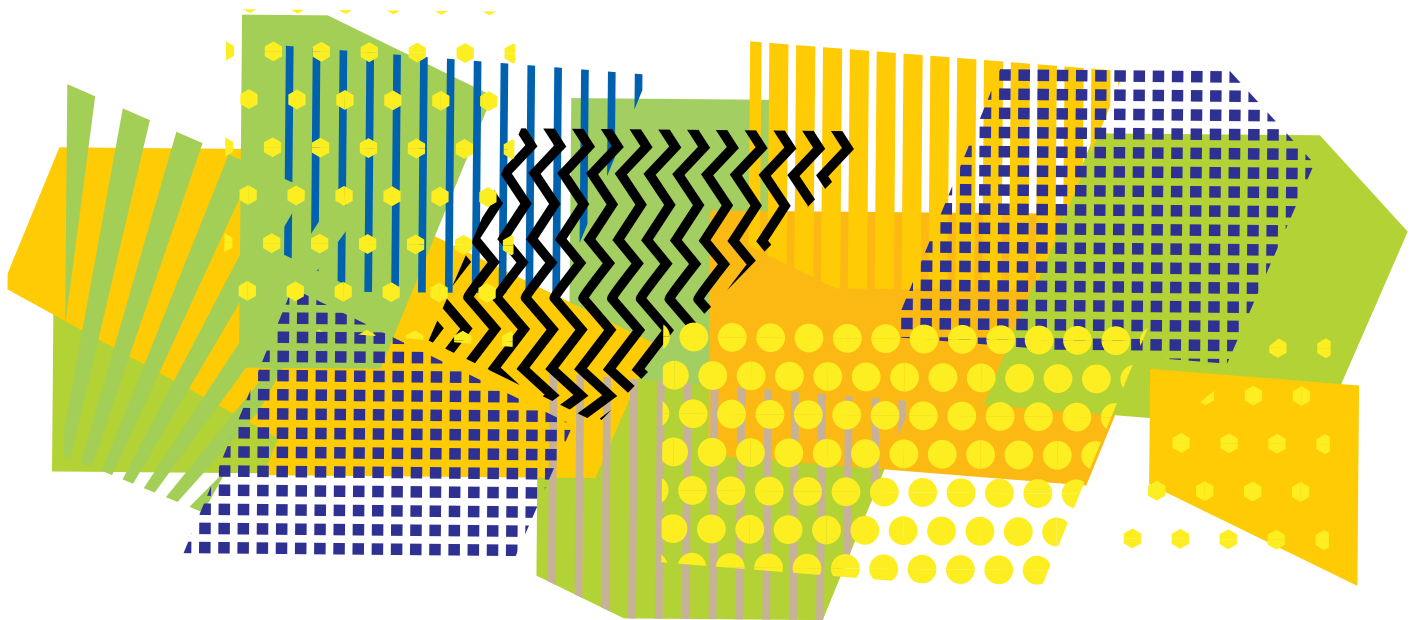
The *Merriam Public Art and Placemaking Master Plan* contains a series of guidelines and recommendations that will assist the Public Art Committee, municipal leaders, and city staff in implementing a successful public art program. The goals of this plan, a result of extensive community visioning, are to **foster place-based pride, rejuvenate and enliven public spaces, and create a more engaged community through public art.**

Many different strategies and tactics can be employed to achieve these goals. This is the magic of public art, and art in general: from a blank canvas, something unpredictable, visionary, and astonishing emerges. In fact, public art can be transformative in so many ways that we did not prioritize specific tactics. Instead, we identified one key strategy which should guide the work of the committee and other decision-makers:

Link each public art project to at least one specific placemaking outcome.

Each of these outcomes can achieve this plan's goal of fostering place-based pride, rejuvenating and enlivening public spaces, and creating a more engaged community. These outcomes in and of themselves are strategic and should remain foundational to Merriam's overall public art strategy—placemaking—no matter the administrative urgency, conditions and characteristics of a site, and committee makeup. Additionally, the placemaking tactics presented in this document can and should be used to address ever-changing community needs.

To do this, we are defining public art in a more expansive way, inclusive of literature, performance, events, and experimental works in addition to visual arts. Public art is self-expression in any media that is created for the benefit of the general public.



Placemaking Outcomes

These outcomes fall into three categories: creative placemaking, or outcomes relating to geographical locations and their qualities; community development, or outcomes relating to people and their needs; and economic development, or outcomes relating to financial growth and prosperity.

CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

- **City Identity**

To many, particularly visitors, Merriam is known as a small, working-class, Kansas City suburb with a strong commercial center and automotive culture. Public art can reflect, elevate, or shift this identity to art itself, in the way that the 1994 sculpture “Shuttlecocks” by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen is synonymous with Kansas City, Missouri.

- **Wayfinding**

Wayfinding has become an important feature for many cities in dense Johnson County. A combination of blue street signs, light pole banners, and gateway markers on major arterials indicate Merriam’s city limits. Public artworks can serve as eye-catching, memorable landmarks that create new associations with Merriam while more accurately representing the city’s unique character.

- **Neighborhood Identity**

Merriam is home to about two dozen residential neighborhoods, each with their own environmental, demographic, cultural, and aesthetic qualities. Dana dar Estates, Knox, Country Place, and western South Park are the most racially diverse while Terry Dale, Mastin’s Subdivision, and Hocker Grove have some of the oldest homes in the city. Public art, either incorporated into neighborhood signage, streetscaping, or within the seven parks scattered throughout Merriam, can both communicate and enhance a neighborhood’s unique character.

- **Gathering Place**

Infrastructure impedes the development of a central gathering place in Merriam; I-35 bifurcates the city and requires expansive rights-of-way that hinder walkability. The city has a somewhat sprawling commercial district, small historic downtown, and two administrative plazas—all of which are located within a one-mile radius of Ikea, Merriam’s geographic center, but are not easy to travel between on foot. However, two city properties serve as nexuses of recreational activity: the Merriam Marketplace and the Merriam Community Center. The sculptures installed at both locations foster interaction, accessibility, and connectivity, which are critical components of a community gathering place.

- **History**

From the California Trail, stagecoaches, and early train routes of the nineteenth century to the Hocker Grove Trolley Line (1907-1930) and the emergence of the Interstate Highway System in the 1950s, Merriam has always been a transportation hub. Another legacy that inspires great pride in Merriam is the 1949 Kansas Supreme Court order to end segregation at South Park Grade School in Merriam, and in schools in every Kansas town with a population under 15,000, effectively paving the way for the landmark 1954 Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka decision ending school segregation nationwide. Public art can celebrate and bring awareness to this incredible history.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- **Health & Safety**

Public art can help residents and visitors navigate a city safely. In Merriam, painted crosswalks or bump outs can create safer intersections for pedestrians and can be traffic-calming interventions for drivers, particularly on Johnson Drive, Merriam Drive, Antioch Road, and W. 67th Street. Functional artworks such as artist-designed bus shelters, bike racks, benches, water fountains, and trash baskets can encourage people to traverse the city and engage in recreational activities comfortably.

- **Engagement**

Public art, public performances, and creative activities can enhance a community's vibrancy and quality of life. Pop-up events and exhibitions engage people as audience members or customers, educational art engages people as learners, interactive art engages people as collaborators, community-made art engages people as creators, and art in unconventional places engages people as explorers.

- **Inclusion**

In order to cultivate an inclusive community using public art, public art projects need to be framed in a more expansive, culturally accessible way. Intentional awareness and engagement can help ensure public art shines a spotlight on underserved or underrepresented communities. For example, future public artworks or Merriam's entire public art program can feature the work of indigenous artists by restricting solicitation eligibility and/or engaging faculty and students at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- **Tourism**

Public art can attract cultural tourists to Merriam. This can be accomplished through the installation of a world-class artwork (“Spiral Jetty,” Rozel Point, Utah) or an artwork by a regionally popular (Nick Cave) or world-renowned (Shepard Fairey) artist. Merriam can also establish itself as a destination for public art by installing a concentration of artworks (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) or a niche artwork collection (Barn Quilt Trail, Harford County, Maryland) and promoting its public artworks alongside its parks, trails, events, restaurants, and retail stores.

- **Property Redevelopment**

Public artworks can infuse underutilized, vacant, or blighted properties with new value. By engaging an interior or exterior space with an installation, sculpture, mural, or creative engagement activity, the property or parcel can become more appealing to business owners looking to lease a brick-and-mortar storefront or developers looking to purchase and transform a property. Additionally, public art can enhance the uniqueness, liveliness, and desirability of a district or neighborhood, spurring private investment in that area.

- **Business Development**

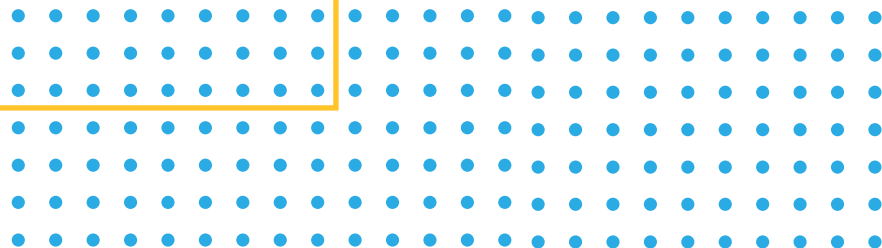
The enhancement of a district or neighborhood with public art can also spur social activity, leading to increased patronage of established businesses in those areas. Businesses can install striking, colorful, or conspicuous public art on and around their buildings to attract customers walking or driving by.

- **Creative Class**

Public art can attract members of the creative class to Merriam. The presence of public art in the city communicates certain values—creativity, originality, authenticity, diversity, innovation—that are shared with the creative class, or those who work in aesthetic, cultural, technological, educational, and other knowledge-based fields. According to *Arts & Economic Prosperity 6*, the most recent economic impact study by Americans for the Arts, arts and cultural nonprofits in Johnson County generated \$38.5 million in economic activity, provided \$21.7 million in personal income to residents, and generated \$6.1 million in tax revenue in 2022.

“I have always been impressed with the forward and inclusive ideas that the leadership and community put into Merriam.”

-Merriam Public Art Survey Respondent



Short-Term Priorities

Ordinance Development

Merriam should formally establish the Public Art Committee, Public Art Impact Fee, and Public Art Fund by ordinance. While this master plan establishes a vision for public art in Merriam and provides recommendations to guide the city in acquiring public art, these ordinances will both clarify and protect the public art program, its processes, and its funding.

Municipal Infrastructure

Public artworks can be incorporated into the city's existing infrastructure fairly quickly, as existing technical and human resources are already in place and ownership is largely retained by the city. Unlike past installations of large, expensive sculptures, public art at many of these sites can be temporary, small-scale, inexpensive, experiential, or experimental. To install permanent public artworks, look for construction projects and road improvements as opportunities to incorporate art interventions more easily.

Ultimately, artwork at these sites *creates place* by infusing ubiquitous structures and mundane spaces with character, uniqueness, and visual appeal. Integrating art into existing infrastructure allows for rapid deployment and widespread impact of public art which can quickly rejuvenate and beautify public spaces, create moments of joy in unexpected places, and enhance the overall quality of life.

Infrastructure can be classified into two categories:

Roadways

- Bike lanes
- Traffic islands
- Roundabouts
- Crosswalks
- Sidewalks
- Bridges
- Parking lots

Fixtures

- Light poles
- Bus shelters
- Benches
- Water fountains
- Trash baskets
- Bike racks
- Parklets

Parks

- Maintaining a relationship with the Johnson County Park and Recreation District (JCPRD) to install temporary or permanent public artworks on county property located within the city. Data collection for this master planning project uncovered a desire for public art and engagement projects at Antioch Park, another county property.
- Working with Overland Park's Parks and Recreation Department and Friends of Overland Park Arts to install public artwork in Robinson Park, half of which is within Merriam city limits.

City Facilities

Continue to use public art to complement or enhance the city's facilities including the Merriam Community Center, the Merriam Municipal Plaza, and the Merriam Historic Plaza.

Other City Properties

The city owns properties that are not classified as infrastructure, parks, or facilities but would make excellent sites for public art. For example:

- **North End of Merriam Drive**
The northernmost Merriam Drive gateway is of particular interest to the city. Anchoring this location is Crest Bible Church at 8715 W. 49th Street, which was, until 2007, the South Park Elementary School. The city owns several properties that could be an excellent location for a piece of public art, particularly one that references or honors the legacy of the South Park neighborhood.
- **W. 55th Terrace**
The city owns one acre of land across the street from the Cinemark movie theater and recreational facility at the corner of Antioch Road and the W. 55th Terrace cul-de-sac.
- **“The Clearing”**
This parcel of land is part of the Turkey Creek Streamway Trail but is not a dedicated park.

Grant Programs

Consider creating a new grant program dedicated to public art on private property, and/or explore whether the following city grant programs can fund public art projects on private property:

- **Historic Merriam Improvement Grant**
This grant program provides 30% reimbursement funds, and up to \$10,000, to business or property owners who invest a minimum of \$3,000 in select exterior improvements. Grant funds are restricted to commercial buildings and can be identified as historic.
- **Neighborhood Island Grant Program**
Merriam’s Neighborhood Island Grant Program partners with individual residents to improve the maintenance and aesthetics of the city’s 20 neighborhood traffic islands. The program reimburses between \$100 and \$500 in pre-approved plant, sod, gravel, and/or contracted labor expenses.

Long-Term Priorities

Projects in Development

Arts integration involves the consideration of art in the beginning or early stages of a project. In order for public artworks to not be seen as adornments to new structures or landscapes, artists and arts facilitators must be recognized as important participants in planning processes. This approach maximizes engagement and placemaking outcomes.

In addition to future projects not yet conceived, there are several city development projects under consideration that may be enhanced by the meaningful and strategic integration of public artworks. The general recommendation is for a member of the Public Art Committee to be appointed to any decision-making body, such as the 5701 Steering Committee, that plans or executes a development project.

- **5701 Merriam Drive**

Various redevelopment projects—including a park with playground, community garden, amphitheater, and Irene B. French memorial—were explored by the 5701 Steering Committee for the five-acre site of the former the Irene B. French Community Center. The property, located across the street from the Merriam Marketplace, is envisioned in the *Merriam Comprehensive Plan 2040* as “the heart of the downtown district with an enhanced green space that offers both active and passive recreational opportunities... Adding additional amenities such as a flexible performing space that can be used for large gatherings, community events, or ice skating in winter, will ensure this is a destination with the downtown core as well as the larger Merriam community.” Recently, the city acquired the former First Church of Christian Scientist at 9224 W. 57th Street, adjacent to this property. Artists can provide multiple contributions to this project as it develops.

- **Downtown Merriam**

Efforts to transform Merriam’s historic downtown district into a thriving, pedestrian-friendly destination remain ongoing. Upon receiving a Planning Sustainable Places grant from the Mid-America Regional Council in 2021, the Downtown Merriam Advisory Committee (DMAC) was formed and worked with a consulting firm to produce the *Downtown Merriam Corridor Plan*. This plan recommends a number of streetscape aesthetics, functional design elements, and “accessories” that should be considered by the Public Art Committee before any recommendation is pursued. Artists, naturally creative thinkers, can contribute to the identity of a place beyond sculptures and murals. Artists can create custom infrastructure enhancements, including light fixtures, banners, signage, crosswalks, monuments, fountains, furniture, bike racks, trash cans, parklets, planters, and more. Before the city finalizes designs for any downtown redevelopment project, it is recommended that the Public Art Committee be engaged to determine how best to integrate artists into the project.

- **Turkey Creek floodplain**

Turkey Creek is a 15-mile-long tributary of the lower Kansas River that runs from Lenexa to Kansas City, Kansas, and is a wonderful natural feature of Merriam. The creek, however, is also prone to flooding, which is expected to become more severe with the advancement of climate change. In 2022, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers entered into contract with the city to design a flood management plan based on its 2015 flood management feasibility study. That study recommended “6,822 feet of floodwall up to 6.5 feet high, 3,383 feet of levees up to 6 feet high, utility modifications, approximately 12,427 Auger Grout Piles, and a 2.14 acre-foot detention area.” Concrete floodwalls and detention areas, or basins, are physically transformational and may deeply impact a community’s sense of place. While flood control systems can be integral to the health, safety, and economic sustainability of a place, they can also be aesthetically, ecologically, and sociologically detrimental.

Public art interventions on or along flood control systems are not unprecedented. [Play the LA River](#) encouraged residents of Los Angeles, California, to “see the notoriously channelized urban river as a multifaceted ecosystem and cultural space connecting the region’s diverse communities” through creative programming including a 52-card deck game. [The Fargo Project](#) is a public art project in Fargo, North Dakota, that activates stormwater detention basins along the Red River watershed through, among other things, socially engaged ecological art. [Paint Louis](#) is an annual event where graffiti artists and muralists descend upon downtown St. Louis, Missouri, to paint and repaint [Mural Mile](#), a two-mile-long stretch of floodwall protecting the city from the Mississippi River.



Partnerships

Two types of collaborative partnerships have been identified as long-term priorities:

1. **Creative** partnerships that promote the city’s public art **opportunities** and increase the **quality** of public art in Merriam.
2. **Engagement** partnerships that promote the city’s public art **collection** and increase the **visibility** of public art in Merriam.

Partnerships refer to public art projects that involve collaboration between Merriam’s Public Art Committee and other city, county, regional, and state partners. While partnerships can be formed quickly, mutually beneficial and enriching partnerships often take time to cultivate. Some examples of collaborative public art projects that could be spearheaded by or involve the committee include:

- Collaborating with teachers and staff at Crestview Elementary School and Merriam Park Elementary School as well as regional schools, including Shawnee Mission North High School to the east and Hocker Grove Middle School to the west, to engage students in arts and community education programs at public art sites throughout Merriam.
- Working with municipal and regional nonprofit arts groups such as the Olathe Public Art Committee, Friends of Overland Park Arts, Leawood Arts Council, Shawnee Public Arts Task Force, and Roeland Park Arts Advisory Committee—among others—to commission public artworks that, for example, share themes or were made by the same artist. This creates alliances, preserves resources, initiates the sharing of best practices, and discourages competition between communities.
- Working with regional tourism organizations, including the Kansas City Regional Destination Alliance and Northeast Kansas Tourism, to promote Merriam’s public art collection to a wider audience.
- Working with regional cultural institutions such as the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art in Overland Park, Kansas; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City, Missouri; and Johnson County Arts and Heritage Center in Overland Park, Kansas, to install temporary or permanent public artworks in conjunction with an institutional exhibition, that are part of an institutional collection, or are created by past or future exhibiting artists.
- Working with regional educational institutions such as Johnson County Community College in Overland Park; Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence; University of Kansas in Lawrence, or Kansas City Art Institute in Kansas City, Missouri, to commission public artworks by students, faculty, staff, or alumni.
- The continued development, placement, and labeling of public art on and around the Merriam Plaza Library grounds.
- Maintaining a relationship with the JCPRD to install temporary or permanent public artworks on county property located within the city. In 2017, the Merriam Public Art Committee received permission from JCPRD to install “Hmmm...” on a strip of county land in Waterfall Park. Data collection for this master planning project uncovered a desire for public art and engagement projects at Antioch Park, another county property.
- Working with the owners of utility boxes throughout Merriam—which may include Evergy, Google, and Overland Park Public Works—to transform them into sculptural murals.

It must be noted that, while the visibility of the I-35 corridor and the size of the right-of-way at each of its five Merriam interchanges make the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) an ideal partner, KDOT prohibits the installation of artwork on the Kansas State Highway System and other state transportation facilities, including roads, streets, bridges, parking areas, intersections, and interchanges. According to the KDOT non-highway use of right-of-way policy for gateway/welcome features, landscaping, and artwork:

Transportation Facilities are not intended to be forums for public speech, and KDOT should not allow ROW to be utilized in a manner - such as allowing the installation of artwork - that could be considered as creating a forum for public speech. "Artwork" includes but is not limited to graphics, designs, murals, paintings, photography, banners, sculptures, pictures or other creative expressions of a visual nature...KDOT recognizes that art, by its nature, is appreciated in a very personal way and may not appeal to everyone equally. What one person considers to be aesthetically or morally pleasing, another person might find offensive. Additionally, an artistic expression that is widely considered to be socially acceptable today might be widely condemned in the future. KDOT should not evaluate and endorse the merits or content of private expression, and KDOT should not decide what private expression is acceptable and what is not.

Monopoles and other billboard structures erected along the I-35 corridor are regulated by the Kansas Highway Beautification Highway Advertising Control Act of 1972 (K.S.A. 68-2231 et seq), revised in 2006. Billboards are increasingly used as sites or “canvases” for public art by museums (MASS MoCA’s [River Street Billboard Project](#) in North Adams, Massachusetts), banks (Wintrust Bank’s [mural building](#) abutting the Kennedy Expressway, Chicago, Illinois), businesses (Searchlight Productions and artist Questlove’s [“Summer of Soul” billboards](#) near I-95, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), and others to feature artists’ work while, if necessary, advertising local products and services such as exhibitions, events, and nonprofits. In fact, this February, Brooklyn-based SaveArtSpace mounted what it called [“a solo public art exhibition”](#) by local artist Davin Watne on a billboard at 2520 Summit Street in Kansas City, across the street from I-35.

Visibility is a key component of the Public Art Committee’s vision of a city identifiable by its arts and culture. Public art in Merriam needs to be seen in order for it to be identifiable, and there are many ways to achieve visibility, including branding, marketing, and art placement. A billboard public art project/series is the type of program the committee can develop on its own, as billboard structures are privately owned but available for rent.



OUTFRONT Media's billboard #2095A at the Shawnee Mission Parkway and Carter Ave interchange. According to the photosheet, this billboard gets 166,352 impressions weekly.

In addition to a billboard art program, the committee and/or city staff can engage partners in strategic marketing collaborations, such as a regional cultural tourism message or brand. According to the *Merriam Comprehensive Plan 2040*, “Merriam should work with the neighboring communities to make additional connections to their public parks and facilities and improve the quality of life for all residents of northeast Johnson County.” At least 12 of Johnson County’s 20 cities have facilitated or supported public art installation(s) of some kind, and half of these communities do not have a public art plan with which to guide or bring awareness to their work. However, some cities in Johnson County support chambers of commerce and/or fund visitors or tourism bureaus, and it is recommended that the Merriam Visitors Bureau collaborate with these groups to promote arts and cultural activities and opportunities.

The Arts Council of Johnson County (ACJC) is also a fantastic regional resource. The independent nonprofit has created several organizational tools including a [digital public art catalog](#) and a [cultural asset map](#) that Merriam officials and committee members can use to coordinate programming or marketing partnerships. The Public Art Committee should also reach out to ACJC to update the digital public art catalog with new public art installations in Merriam.

Private Property

Although public art plans tend to provide guidance and options for municipal-owned property only, there are a number of private properties that could make excellent locations for public art in Merriam. The choice to install public art on private property is entirely up to the landowner, but this section of the plan is meant to inspire landowners to consider public art as well as assist the Public Art Committee in supporting art projects on private property that contribute to the city’s aesthetic and placemaking goals. See [pages 46 - 51](#) for examples of public art projects on privately owned sites.

Any landowner who wishes to install public art on their property must first ensure the artwork adheres to Merriam’s Code of Ordinances, particularly [Chapter 53: Signs and Other Advertising](#). According to section 53-35, “works of fine art, when not displayed in conjunction with a commercial enterprise (nor display a commercial message), which enterprise may benefit direct commercial gain from such display,” may be considered a sign or other device that is exempt from city permit requirements. For additional questions about regulations pertaining to privately owned but publicly accessible artworks, please contact Merriam’s Community Development Department.

Facilitators of public art projects on private property are **not** required to apply to or receive approval from Merriam’s Public Art Committee. However, the committee encourages landowners to contribute to the city’s vibrancy, cultural identity, and sense of place by erecting their own public artworks. Additionally, the committee may seek to forge partnerships with landowners to facilitate special public art projects. For example, Lee Jeans’ former headquarters at 9001 W. 67th Street was purchased in September 2020 by Nations Holding Company for \$5.1 million. Although the site is privately owned, redevelopment concept plans for this parcel were included in the *Merriam Comprehensive Plan 2040*. If the landowner wishes to develop some or all of the proposed concept elements, it is recommended that the Public Art Committee advocate for the possible inclusion of public artwork with Nations Holding Company.

Community Preferences

The online public art survey administered in October 2023 not only assessed engagement with and the impact of Merriam’s current public artworks, but it also sought to understand which public art themes and locations were the most popular for future public art planning.

1. Future Locations for Public Art

Over half of all respondents would like to see more public art in city streets/medians/roundabouts/sidewalks, Antioch Park, historic downtown corridor, and unexpected places. City parks (other than Antioch Park) had lower rates of preference than we anticipated. “My neighborhood” was also rated lower than expected.

Of those respondents who would prefer to see public art in their neighborhood, 14% lived in Hickory Hills, 9% lived in Meyers Estates, and 8% lived in Edelweiss, Hocker Grove, and South Park each.

2. Future Public Art Themes

Nature/environment was the preferred public art theme of over 68% of all respondents. Functional and traditional aesthetic themes were also preferred by over half of all respondents. In fact, when cross-referenced, nature/environment was the top-rated theme for all locations *except* the Merriam Municipal Plaza (traditional aesthetics was more preferred) and the Merriam Historic Plaza (nature/environment and traditional aesthetics were equally preferred).

Preferred Public Art Locations	% of total
City streets/medians/roundabouts/sidewalks	55.9%
Antioch Park	55.3%
Historic downtown corridor	53.1%
Unexpected places	51.2%
Merriam Marketplace	43.8%
Merriam Community Center	43.2%
Turkey Creek Streamway Trail	42.5%
Waterfall Park	34.8%
My neighborhood	29.2%
Chatlain Park	27.3%
Public transit stops	27.3%
Merriam Historic Plaza	26.4%
Brown Park	26.1%
Public school(s)	25.8%
Shopping centers	24.8%
Merriam Municipal Plaza	23.2%
Werner Park	22.4%
Vacant lots	21.7%
Quail Creek Park	20.5%

Preferred Public Art Themes	% of total
Nature/environment	68.2%
Functional	56.6%
Aesthetics—traditional	56.3%
History	48.6%
Culture/traditions	44.0%
Whimsical	38.8%
Interactive/community-created	37.0%
Aesthetics—non-traditional	36.4%
Temporary	20.8%
Social	18.3%
Sports/recreation	16.5%
None of these appeal to me	6.4%
Politics	2.1%

3. Other Preferences

The survey question that best solicited the opinions and motivations of respondents was question #10: "Do you have any other comments about Merriam's current public art, future public art, public art process, or other issues related to a city-wide public art master plan?" We received 108 responses to this long answer question. 60 comments were submitted by pro-public art respondents, 32 by anti-public art respondents, 14 by respondents who felt neutral about continued investment in public art, and two by respondents who didn't submit a response to the statement, "I would like to see more public artworks in Merriam."

Top Pro- Topics	% of count
community engagement	20.6%
quality	13.2%
history	11.8%
murals	10.3%
communication	8.8%
exhibits	5.9%
traditional	5.9%

The topic most mentioned by pro-public art respondents was community engagement—respondents either appreciated the level of community engagement taking place in this process thus far, or asked for community engagement to be built into future public art decision-making processes. Other topics of concern for pro-public art respondents include the quality of art that has been/will be chosen, the desire for new public artworks to reflect Merriam's history, and the desire for murals to be included in the new public art program.

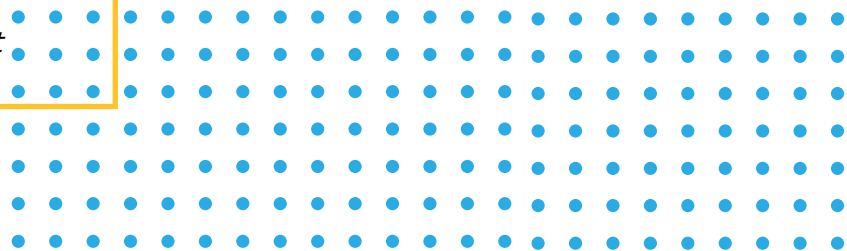
4. Open House Feedback

The open house held in December 2023 provided residents with a second opportunity to state their preferences for future public artworks. One question assessed attendees' feelings about the scale of future artworks. Two questions sought to challenge attendees' definition of public art by asking about engagement activities such as public performances.

Select Open House Questions	Yes	Maybe	No
Should the city install large-scale AND small-scale public artworks?	73.3%	6.7%	20.0%
Should the Public Art Committee develop engagement activities?	60.0%	26.7%	13.3%
Should public art funds be used for arts programming or engagement activities?	85.7%	7.1%	7.1%

"I love living in a city that cares about our residents' opinions AND art."

-Merriam Public Art Survey Respondent



5. Open House Map

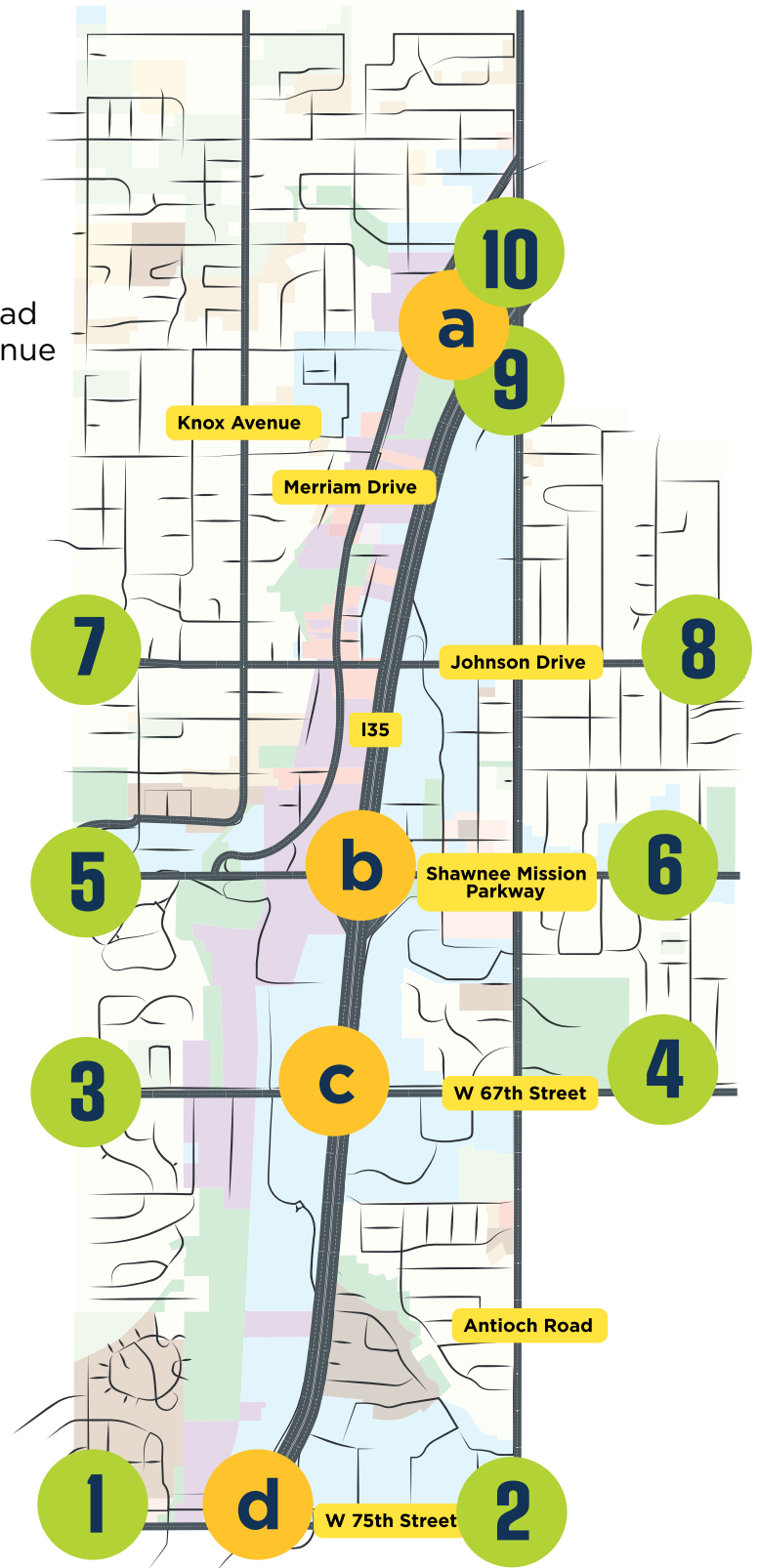
Attendees were also asked to participate in three map activities related to future public art planning:

- Should the city place public art at certain recommended locations? (Yes/Maybe/No)
- Future public art site identification (blue stickers)
- Types of public art on future sites (murals, sculptures, functional, installations/other, engagement activity)

Location Category	Location	Yes	New Site	Art Type
Gateways	Shawnee Mission Parkway and 63rd interchange	2	2	sculpture (5)
Corridors	67th and Knox		1	functional (1)
Gathering Places	Merriam Community Center			installation (1)
	Merriam Marketplace			engagement (1)
	Historic downtown corridor			mural (1)
	Brown Memorial Park		1	installation (1)
	Chatlain Park		2	sculpture (1)
	Antioch Park		1	engagement (2)
	"The Clearing"		4	engagement (2) sculpture (2) functional (1)
	Bus stops on Johnson Drive			functional (2)
	Crestview Elementary School			mural (1) sculpture (1)
	Merriam Park School			mural (1) sculpture (1)
Other	Hickory Hills		3	
	Edelweiss		1	
	Street islands			sculpture (1)
	Former community center			sculpture (1)

Corridors and Gateways

1. W. 75th Street and Switzer Lane
2. W. 75th Street and Antioch Road
3. W. 67th Street and Switzer Lane
4. W. 67th Street and Lowell Avenue
5. Shawnee Mission Parkway & Switzer Road
6. Shawnee Mission Parkway & Lowell Avenue
7. Johnson Drive and Switzer Road
8. Johnson Drive and Robinson Lane
9. Antioch Road and Antioch Drive
10. Antioch Road and W. 50th Terrace
11. I-35 interchanges
 - a. Antioch Road
 - b. Shawnee Mission Parkway
 - c. 67th Street
 - d. 75th Street



Gathering Places

1. Merriam Community Center
2. Merriam Marketplace
3. Merriam Municipal Plaza
4. Merriam Town Center/Merriam Village
5. Historic downtown corridor

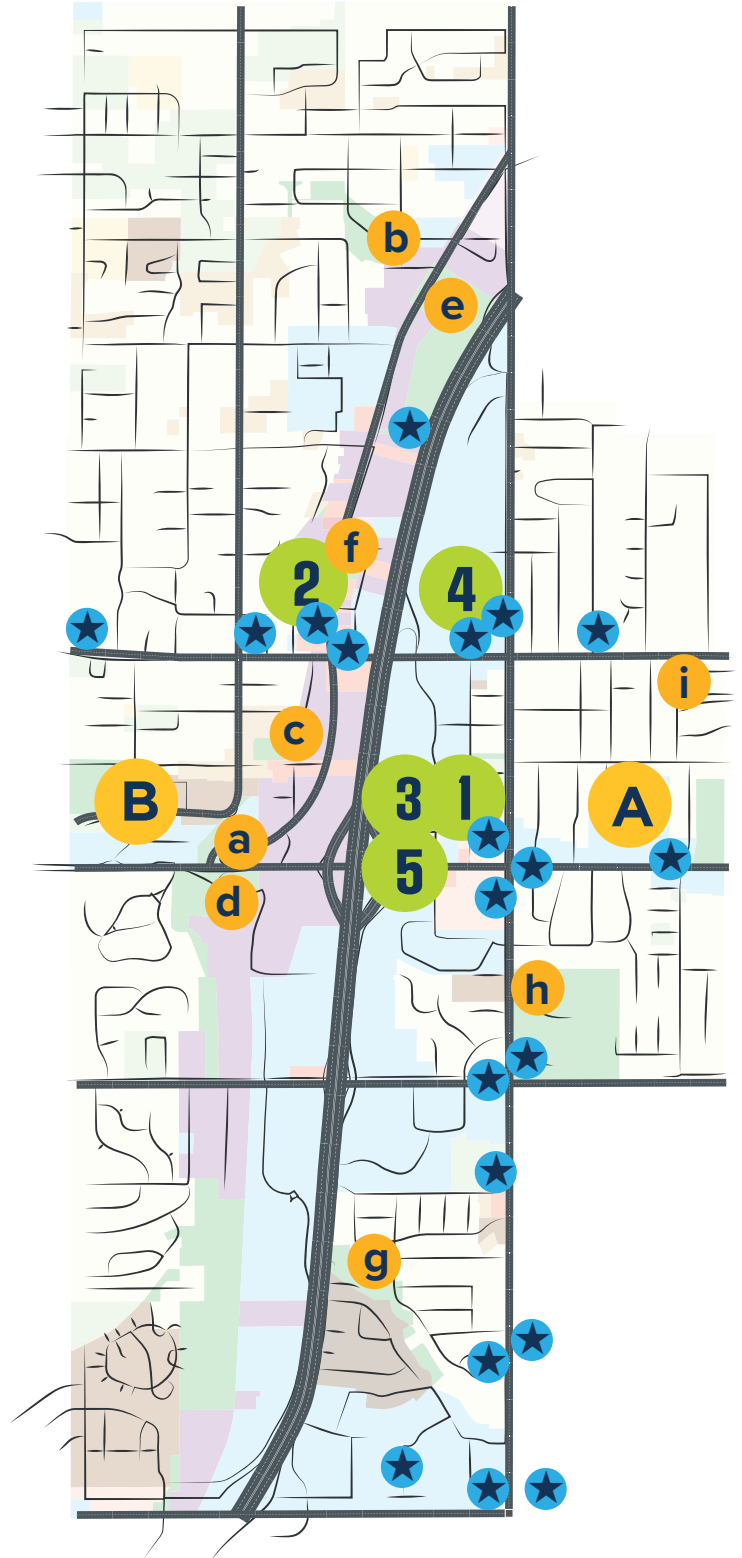
City parks and trail(s)

- a. Turkey Creek Streamway Trail
- b. Brown Memorial Park
- c. Campbell Park
- d. Chatlain Park
- e. Waterfall Park
- f. Werner Park
- g. Quail Creek Park
- h. Antioch Park
- i. "The Clearing"

Schools

- A. Crestview Elementary School
- B. Merriam Park Elementary School

★ RideKC bus stop(s)



SAMPLE SITES

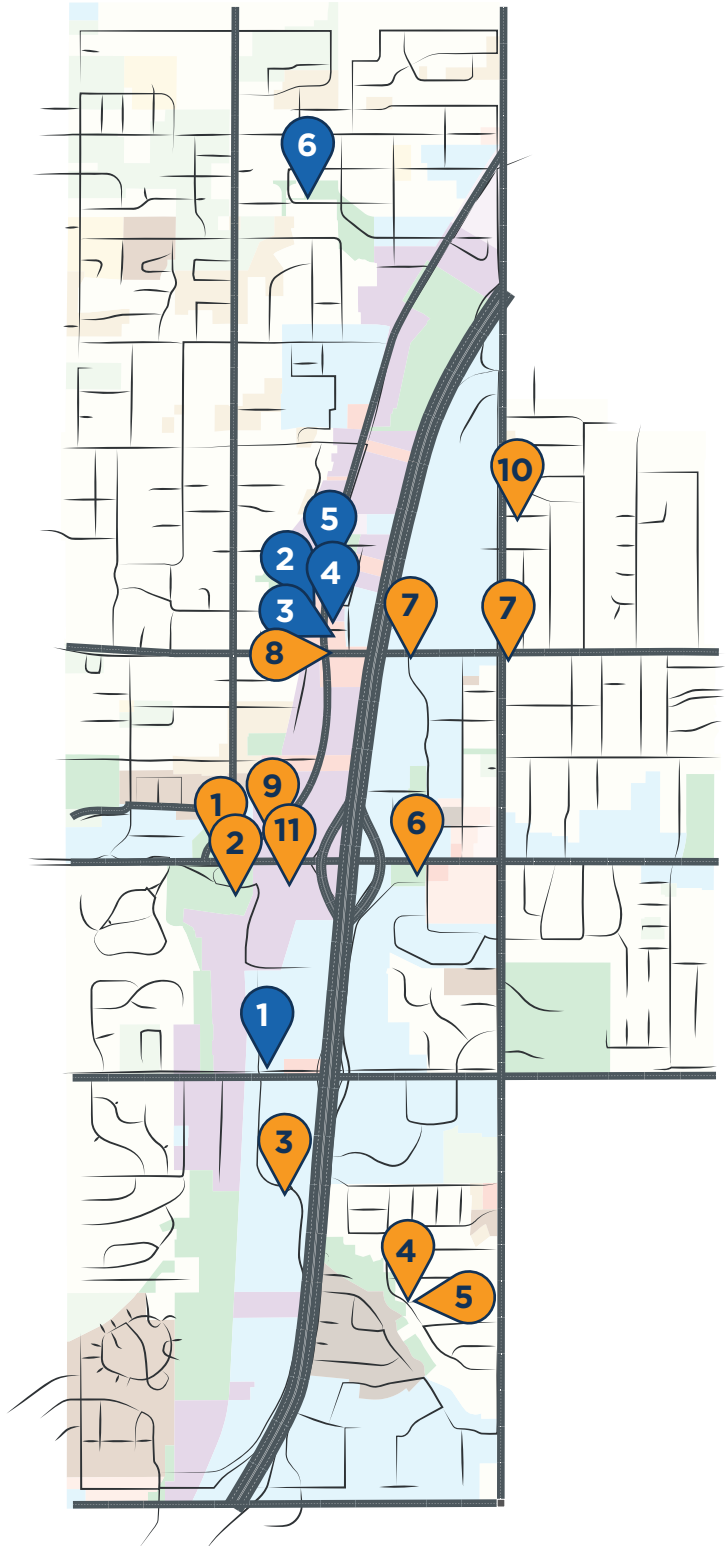
Sample Site Key



City Property



Private Property





Location: Shawnee Mission Parkway bridge over Carter Avenue

Property: City

Coordination: PAC

Type: Mural, light installation, sound installation



Location: Shawnee Mission Parkway off-ramp at Carter Avenue

Property: City

Coordination: PAC

Type: Installation, functional



Location: W. Frontage Road and Turkey Creek Drive roundabout

Property: City

Coordination: PAC

Type: Sculpture



Location: Traffic island at Grandview Drive and W. 71st Street Terrace

Property: City

Coordination: PAC

Type: Sculpture, functional



Location: Electrical box at Grandview Drive and W. 71st Street Terrace

Property: City

Coordination: Partnership

Type: Mural



Location: Merriam Historic Plaza, 6304 E. Frontage Road

Property: City

Coordination: PAC

Type: Sculpture, functional, installation



Location: Bus stop at Johnson Drive and Ikea Way

Property: City

Coordination: PAC

Type: Functional



Location: Bus stop at Johnson Drive and W. Campbell Lane

Property: City

Coordination: PAC

Type: Functional



Location: “The Clearing”

Property: City

Coordination: PAC

Type: Functional, sculpture, engagement, installation



Location: Antioch Road between W. 55th Street and Johnson Drive

Property: City

Coordination: PAC

Type: Sculpture



Location: Turkey Creek Streamway Trail

Property: City

Coordination: PAC

Type: Functional, sculpture, installation, engagement



Location: StorageMart, 9702 W. 67th Street

Property: Private

Coordination: Partnership

Type: Mural



Location: Nationwide Auto, 5820 Merriam Drive

Property: Private

Coordination: Partnership

Type: Mural



Location: True Auto Parts & Paint, 5837 Merriam Drive

Property: Private

Coordination: Partnership

Type: Mural



Location: Strip's Chicken & Dive Bar, 5831 Merriam Drive

Property: Private

Coordination: Partnership

Type: Mural



Location: 5757 Merriam Drive (office building for sale)

Property: Private

Coordination: Partnership

Type: Engagement



Location: Philadelphia Missionary Baptist Church, 9420 W. 50th Terrace
(former Walker Elementary School)

Property: Private

Coordination: Partnership

Type: Sculpture, functional, installation

ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDELINES

These administrative guidelines provide recommendations for the planning, funding, facilitation, and promotion of Merriam's public art program and clarify the roles and responsibilities of municipal departments and other stakeholders essential to the public art process.

Guiding Principles

The *Merriam Public Art and Placemaking Master Plan* seeks to foster place-based pride, rejuvenate and enliven public spaces, and create a more engaged community through the installation of public artworks that achieve various placemaking outcomes. The plan also establishes the mission, vision, and values of the Public Art Committee—the entity responsible for advancing public art in Merriam—which ensures these goals are met.

Mission: To participate with Merriam residents, visitors, and artists to facilitate connections that generate opportunities to appreciate the community in new ways.

Vision: A future in which Merriam is identified by arts and culture.

Values: Engagement - Community - Beautification.

Merriam's public art program should focus on developing and implementing public art projects that celebrate the city's history and **engage** its residents, draw attention to and **beautify** public space, and position Merriam as a vibrant **community** supportive of and supported by arts and culture.



Roles and Responsibilities

PUBLIC ART COORDINATOR

Direct oversight of Merriam's public art program should be the responsibility of a dedicated coordinator who serves as a liaison between city officials and staff, the Public Art Committee, artists, and the community. The coordinator plays a critical role in the program, implementing the public art plan and executing all public art projects. This should be a full-time, salaried position. Until such time, this can be the responsibility of an assigned staff liaison or a hired consultant.

Responsibilities

- Maintain communication and a relationship with the Public Art Committee, attend recurring and special committee meetings, organize meeting materials, and update the committee on city news, issues, opportunities, requests, and staff changes.
- Post meeting agendas and minutes.
- Submit an annual work plan to the City Council that recommends public art projects chosen by the committee including site(s), funding source(s), and placemaking outcome(s) as well as an annual year-end report to the City Council that provides updates to city-led public art projects, changes to the city's public art collection, and the status of public art plan implementation.
- Create a fiscal year program operating budget that details income allocated from the general fund, Public Art Impact Fee funds available for municipal spending, grants, and donations as well as anticipated expenditures and projected costs including but not limited to:
 - » Projects carrying over from the previous fiscal year, new public art projects, and any special activities as requested by the Public Art Committee;
 - » Staffing and consultants; and
 - » Collection management and maintenance.
- Coordinate and execute all tasks necessary for the successful commissioning, purchasing, and installing of public art projects, including but not limited to:
 - » Drafting solicitations including calls for art, RFPs, and RFQs;
 - » Receiving responses to solicitations and reviewing/vetting responses;
 - » Communicating with artist applicants, semi-finalists, finalists, and awardees;
 - » Working with the city attorney to prepare and distribute contracts or agreements;
 - » Convening necessary city staff for technical reviews of artwork proposals; and
 - » Coordinating with city departments, artists, and professional services on artwork installation, inspection, conservation, and removal.
- Ensure all city, county, state, and federal policies and procedures are followed.
- Coordinate with the mayor regarding vacant committee seats and/or filling open terms.
- Work with applicable city departments on the integration of public art in all development plans and projects.
- Develop activities intended to engage members of the community with public art, such as neighborhood meetings, digital art walk maps, public art workshops, and events around the unveiling of public art projects.
- Work with applicable city departments to inform, educate, and engage the public about the city's public art opportunities and collection, and serve as the point of contact for inquiries about public artworks, the Public Art Committee, or Merriam's public art process.
- Manage the city's public art collection and maintain the public art catalog.
- Assist in securing alternative funds to support Merriam's public art program, if necessary, which may include writing grant applications, managing grant awards, and accepting financial gifts.

Given these responsibilities, it is recommended that the coordinator possess a public art, public programming, fine art, curation, or creative placemaking background or other arts management experience. Due to the collaborative nature of the public art program and its connection to the Public Art Committee and the City Council, we recommend this position fall within the Administration department.

PUBLIC ART COMMITTEE

The role of the Public Art Committee, currently a volunteer advisory committee comprising eight voting members and two non-voting members, is to serve as the primary decision-making body for Merriam's public art program. The committee develops public art projects and recommends municipal properties, artists, and artworks with which to engage in those projects.

Responsibilities

- Hold recurring public meetings to discuss public art in Merriam and ways by which the *Merriam Public Art and Placemaking Master Plan* can be executed. Activities and topics for committee discussion include but are not limited to:
 - » Initiating public art projects and engagement activities by selecting a priority site and at least one associated placemaking outcome;
 - » Determining content to be included in calls for art, RFPs, and RFQs including the project budget and timeline;
 - » Determining selection processes and criteria;
 - » Reviewing call, RFP, and RFQ responses;
 - » Selecting project semi-finalists, finalists, and awardees for recommendation to the City Council; and
 - » Vetting and pursuing select grant opportunities.
- Conduct an annual review of the *Merriam Public Art and Placemaking Master Plan* and recommend revisions to plan objectives, procedures, and guidelines after five years.

MAYOR

Responsibilities

- Appoint individuals to seats on the Public Art Committee.
- Execute contracts related to the implementation, installation, and maintenance of public art projects and acquisition of works of public art upon receipt of the City Council's approval.

CITY COUNCIL

Responsibilities

- Review and adopt this and future public art master plans.
- Approve the mayor's Public Art Committee appointments.
- Approve public art projects and acquisitions as proposed by the Public Art Committee.
- Approve the annual city budget which may allocate funding from the general fund, if necessary, to support the work of the Public Art Committee.
- Two City Councilmembers should sit on the Public Art Committee as non-voting members. This ensures alignment between the City Council's goals and initiatives and the work of the committee.

MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENTS

The Public Art Committee and coordinator are encouraged to enlist the support of these and other departments to ensure that proposed public art projects can be implemented without endangering public safety or interfering with the execution of municipal duties.

Responsibilities

- **Parks and Recreation**

Parks, trails, and the Merriam Community Center make excellent sites for public art, and city-sponsored events provide fantastic opportunities for public art-based engagement activities.

- **Community Development**

The Community Development Department enforces codes and zoning, issues permits, administers grants, may help facilitate necessary inspections, and interfaces with developers whose projects may be subject to a Public Art Impact Fee, once adopted.

- **Public Works**

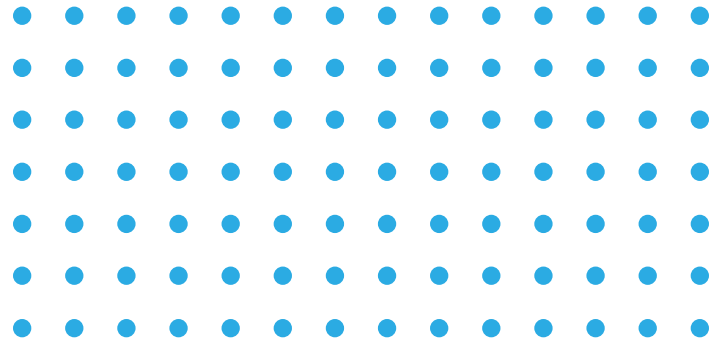
Public Works assists with artwork installation and maintenance; provides park, street, and facility maintenance; and enforces infrastructure standards.

- **Administration**

The communications and public engagement manager may assist in publicizing calls for art, engagement activities, surveys, artwork dedications, advocacy messaging, and any other activity that requires public participation. As the city's promotional office, the Merriam Visitors Bureau publicizes its public art collection to drive cultural tourism.

- **Police**

The Merriam Police Department protects against and/or investigates the willful destruction of public artworks and ensures the safety of those engaging with public artworks.



Public Art Procurement

The following summarizes the recommended process for procuring public artworks. This process applies to permanent and temporary public art projects as well as engagement activities. Most public art projects will be selected through a call for art, RFP, or RFQ process. Administration will recommend if and when the committee will consider unsolicited applications, proposals, or donations.

STEP 1: DEVELOP A PUBLIC ART PROJECT

The initial step for procuring public art is to develop a project. Two elements should be identified by the Public Art Committee before all others:

- Placemaking outcome(s)
- Site(s)

These do not have to be identified in this order. For example, committee members may feel an urgency to use the next public art project to spark property redevelopment or, through discussion, a consensus may arise that commissioning a highly visible billboard mural along I-35 is most important. During these discussions, the committee should refer to this plan, particularly the Placemaking Guidelines ([pg 19](#)) and Public Art Planning ([pg 10](#)) sections, to consider input from members of the community as well as the context informing some of these opinions, respectively.

Once a site or sites and at least one placemaking outcome have been selected, the coordinator should circulate the project framework to pertinent city departments for logistical feedback. Then, the committee should discuss and agree on the following project elements:

- **Budget**
The overall project budget should account for semi-finalist stipends, artwork fabrication and installation, artist honorariums, and other known project-related costs
- **Schedule**
The project schedule, though it may be tentative, should include deadlines for call/RFP/RFQ submissions, semi-finalist and finalist notifications, finalist presentations, awardee notification, artwork installation, and artwork dedication.
- **Artist eligibility**
Artist eligibility is likely to be tied to a placemaking outcome; it may be important to determine whether a public art project will be open to any artist or restricted to artists of a certain age, gender, race, ability, or geographic location.
- **Selection process**
The committee should determine a process by which applications will be reviewed and semi-finalists, finalists, and/or awardee(s) are selected. Each project's selection process should be led by the Public Art Committee, with additional participation or engagement by non-committee members such as residents, business owners, artists, curators, consultants, city staff, arts administrators, and others if desired by the committee and on a project-by-project basis. The committee will determine whether a non-committee reviewer will receive a stipend for their work. Any reviewer of an application or proposal is hereby referred to as a juror.

STEP 2: RECEIVE PROJECT APPROVAL

Once a project plan containing the aforementioned elements has been written, the coordinator will bring it to the Public Art Committee for approval and submit it to the City Council for approval.

STEP 3: DEVELOP A SOLICITATION

The City will then circulate either a call for art, an RFP, or an RFQ, depending on the project. Each of these solicitation methods are used for different purposes and require different materials from applicants.

- **Call for Art**

A call for art is a request for a specific artwork or artworks. This type of request is most commonly used to populate exhibitions, competitions, events, and public art projects that are not site-specific (public art on uniform structures such as utility boxes, billboards, banners, etc. as well as artworks shown as part of a temporary public art exhibition or festival). Calls for art may require applicants to pay a submission fee—which is used to cover administrative costs or pay juror(s)—and usually require applicants to submit contact information; a bio, resume, and/or artist statement; at least one image of the completed and available artwork; and artwork information.

- **RFP**

An RFP is a request for a specific concept proposal. RFPs require applicants to respond to a predetermined set of conditions including but not limited to a site location, budget, timeline including duration of display, and project goal(s)—all of which should be clearly stated in the RFP. Because of this, RFPs tend to be used to select specific types of artworks for sites that have minimal demands (the courtyard of an office building, for example). RFPs can also be used to select artwork quickly. Generally, RFPs neither require an applicant to pay a fee nor offer applicants a stipend for their submission. As a result, RFPs tend to produce a smaller number of local applicants, but these proposals are more likely to high quality, as only interested and experienced artists invest the time to assemble a complete proposal without compensation.

- **RFQ**

An RFQ is a request for an artist's qualifications and past work. RFQs allow municipalities, jurors, and other decision-makers to collect a wide variety (geography, media, age, experience, etc.) of applications from artists who may be interested in technically complex, large scale, expensive, or highly customized public art installations. RFQs provide decision-makers with two opportunities to vet applicants. First, RFQ submissions are evaluated based on alignment with project goals and priorities as well as artists' capability, and generally require a cover letter or statement of interest; bio, resume, and/or artist statement; portfolio; and references. Then, no more than five applicants would be invited to produce a detailed proposal which may require a project narrative, timeline including duration of display, budget, illustrations, fabrication plan, installation plan, maintenance plan, and landscaping plan (if applicable). These semi-finalists should be given an appropriate amount of time and compensation to develop a detailed vision, plans, and renderings or mock-ups for their project, which may require them to visit the site in person.

The solicitation will be written by the coordinator, reviewed and approved by the Public Art Committee, then publicized by the coordinator and/or communications staff.

It is recommended that at least one public Q&A or info session be scheduled for each RFP and RFQ. A session could take place in person or virtually via Zoom or other digital video platform. This allows interested artists to ask questions about the solicitation, application process, eligibility, and/or project goals, which may result in self-elimination or stronger proposals. It is not recommended that applicants submit questions in writing, as applicants can learn a great deal from exposure to others' questions, and live sessions streamline the Q&A process for the coordinator.

If the pool of applicants is too limited in size, qualifications, or other factor, the deadline should be extended and the solicitation re-publicized.

STEP 4: SELECT SEMI-FINALISTS/FINALISTS/AWARDEE(S)

The Public Art Committee should develop criteria that are as objective as possible and by which all project proposals can be reviewed. These criteria may change to suit the goals and priorities of each project, and RFQ criteria developed to choose semi-finalists may differ from criteria that assesses detailed proposals. Criteria should fall into two categories:

- **Placemaking criteria**
Criteria that address the project's placemaking goal(s).
- **Operational criteria**
Criteria that assess the feasibility of the proposal.

It is recommended that an evaluation rubric be used which numerically assesses all criterion. If more than one individual is reviewing proposals, the same evaluation rubric should be used by all jurors. Then, the jurors should meet to name and discuss their own top five highest scoring proposals, and collectively agree on two or three finalists to present at a Public Art Committee meeting.

If an RFQ was used to generate applications, the juror(s) should meet to name and discuss their own top five highest scoring applications, then collectively agree on no more than five semi-finalists. The coordinator, a committee member, or juror should contact the semi-finalists' references and ask questions about the applicant's experiences with public art projects, community engagement, and other topics pertinent to the project. Site visits, studio visits, and/or meetings with city staff or community stakeholders may also be arranged at this time. Barring negative references that may disqualify an applicant, all semi-finalists will be invited by the coordinator to develop and submit a comprehensive proposal which should be scored using another evaluation rubric. After individual scoring, juror(s) should meet to name and discuss their own highest scoring semi-finalists, then collectively agree on two or three finalists to present at a Public Art Committee meeting.

All finalists will be required to present their proposal to the Public Art Committee at a public meeting. Finalists' proposals should be reviewed by all committee members individually in advance of the public meeting. During the public meeting, the committee should deliberate and choose one proposal by vote as the awardee. The vote may be conditional.



STEP 5: ENTER INTO CONTRACT

The awardee's proposal should be circulated to pertinent municipal departments for technical review, allowing the artist to make fabrication, installation, or other logistical adjustments as necessary. Upon departmental review, the coordinator will present the finalized proposal to the Public Art Committee, then the City Council. Upon the City Council approval's, a contract or agreement will be drafted by a city attorney and sent to the awardee by the coordinator. The artist will sign on their behalf, and the mayor will sign on behalf of the City of Merriam.

The contract or agreement should include the artist's final proposal—which may include a project narrative, timeline including duration of display, budget, illustrations, fabrication plan, installation plan, maintenance plan, and landscaping plan (if applicable)—as well as the following clauses:

- Payment schedule and terms
- Permits, protection, prevention of site access and risk
- Representation and warranties
- City responsibilities
- Ownership and rights
- Indemnification
- Insurance
- Compliance with equal opportunity laws, regulations, and rules
- Termination
- Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA) waiver
- Artist's rights

STEP 6: FABRICATE AND INSTALL ARTWORK

The artist then commences the contract or agreement. The coordinator will work with the artist and any municipal departments to ensure that all necessary permits and applicable site permissions are submitted and received, respectively, before installation. The coordinator will also ensure that all site preparation or essential infrastructure not provided by the artist as outlined in the contract or agreement is in place, monitor the artwork's fabrication if taking place on city property, and manage the scheduling and coordination of artwork and signage installation with all appropriate municipal departments, partnering business or contractors, and/or property owners. Once installation is complete, the coordinator will confirm the artwork's landscaping and/or maintenance plan, including maintenance schedule and availability of staff and/or equipment, with Public Works and collect outstanding documentation from the artist which may include manufacturer warranties and/or photography of the artwork in situ.

STEP 7: UNVEILING AND DEDICATION

Following the successful fabrication and installation of the artwork as well as landscaping and other site repair, the coordinator will work with the city's communications team to update the city's public art webpage and host an unveiling, dedication, or other public event to formalize and celebrate the project's completion.

STEP 8: ENGAGEMENT

Of course, the placement of a public artwork is only the beginning of Merriam's relationship with it. The coordinator is encouraged to work with Administration, the Merriam Visitors Bureau, Parks and Recreation, other municipal departments, area schools, community groups including homeowners associations, and regional organizations such as ACJC, Johnson County Kansas Heritage Foundation, and JCPRD to promote awareness and engagement of all public artworks through websites, social media, digital or printed maps, self- or docent-guided art walks, public programs, and other community events.

Funding

In addition to funds allocated by the City Council and sourced from the Public Art Impact Fee once a percent for art ordinance is adopted, Merriam’s public art program can be bolstered in other ways.

Grants

Grants are incredibly competitive in Kansas, which is one of the least culturally funded states in the nation. The Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, which serves Johnson County, does not appear to fund public art projects or municipalities. Most grants available to local governments will not fund art for art’s sake but, instead, will fund community engagement or creative placemaking projects that will have a long-lasting social and/or economic impact on the community. Among the grant programs that Merriam and its Public Art Committee may be eligible for are:

- [Rocket Grants](#), Charlotte Street Foundation/ The Andy Warhol Foundation
- [Public Art & Murals Grant](#), Kansas Arts Commission
- [Engaging Placemaking for Innovative Communities \(EPIC\)](#), Kansas Arts Commission/ Kansas Department of Commerce/ Patterson Family Foundation
- [Rural Mural Program](#), Office of Rural Prosperity, Kansas Department of Commerce
- [Regional Touring Program](#), Mid-America Arts Alliance
- [Our Town](#), National Endowment for the Arts
- [Challenge America](#), National Endowment for the Arts

Sponsorships

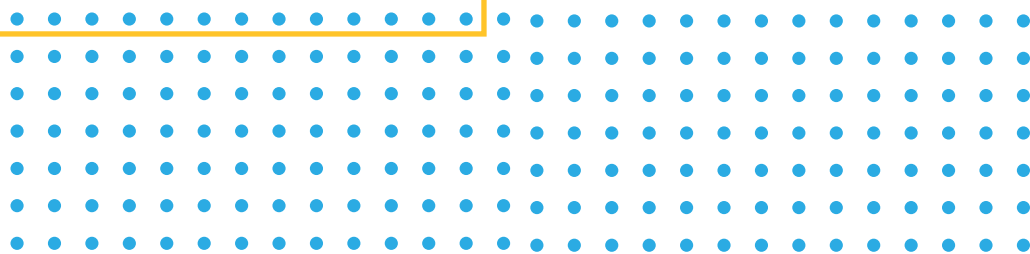
Merriam-based businesses and corporations may be willing to support public art projects that improve neighborhoods and create a sense of place and identity in the city. Public art and placemaking are not eligible for funding from the Ikea Foundation, however, as it focuses solely on climate change and climate refugees. Large businesses that may provide public art program or project sponsorship are AdventHealth Shawnee Mission, car dealerships such as Aristocrat Motors, and banks like U.S. Bank, although the city may have already cultivated their support to fund Merriam Drive Live and other free community events. Instead, sponsorships are likely to come from long-term relationships forged with various programmatic or marketing partners.

In-Kind Donations

In-kind donations are donations other than cash, including materials and volunteer labor. Some businesses may not give money but would be happy to donate materials towards a public art project, such as wood or paint.

“I have really loved how much we’ve invested in public art in Merriam. It gives the city character that I don’t know that a lot of the other surrounding suburbs have.”

-Merriam Public Art Survey Respondent



IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the *Merriam Public Art and Placemaking Master Plan* is based on the development and execution of public art projects, and a step-by-step process for artwork procurement is outlined in the Administrative Guidelines section. However, several strategies may enable the plan to be fully realized and successful.

STRATEGY 1: COMMITTEE ENGAGEMENT

Ultimately, the success of this plan lies in the engagement of the Public Art Committee. Serving as the decision-making body for Merriam’s public art program, the committee develops public art projects and recommends municipal properties, artists, and artworks with which to engage in those projects. An active and robust committee is required to support an active and robust public art program. Below are several tactics that may ensure committee engagement.

- A. Meetings.** Schedule a full year of committee meetings in advance. Meetings that are held on a recurring monthly date are most effective; this consistency allows both committee members and interested residents to plan their schedules around these meetings. Recurring meetings also keep committee members task-focused.
- B. Vacancies.** Fill vacant committee seats as quickly as possible.
- C. Orientation.** A committee orientation packet may not be necessary, as this plan contains most of that content. However, new committee members may be more prepared to hit the ground running if provided a committee contact list, the annual work plan, and an update of the committee’s activities to date.
- D. Ordinance.** Codify the Public Art Committee by ordinance.

STRATEGY 2: ORGANIZATION

Proper organization will ensure the strategic development and successful implementation of public art projects, efficient coordination of various stakeholders, and clear allocation of resources—leading to the effective management of Merriam’s public art program.

- A. Database.** For maximum relevancy and efficacy, treat this plan as a living document. The guidelines presented should allow the committee to install public art based on changing community needs, artistic trends, and city priorities—making a proactive, not reactive, committee and staff liaison necessary. It can be helpful to develop, update, and continuously review a dynamic database of people (regional artists and stakeholders), places (possible artwork sites), and things (community events) that the committee can engage, and use this information to brainstorm future projects
- B. Materials.** Develop generic solicitation templates in advance, and collect and track solicitation responses with software or other organizational tools.
- C. Toolkits.** There is no need to reinvent the wheel. Pre-existing public art and placemaking toolkits can help answer lingering questions or inspire new ideas. In addition to joining Americans for the Arts’ [Public Art Network](#) (PAN), we recommend:
 - [Navigating Main Streets as Places: A People-First Transportation Toolkit](#), Main Street America and Project for Public Spaces, 2019
 - [Art in the Right of Way Toolkit](#), Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) Center for Social Design, 2018
 - [How to do Creative Placemaking](#), National Endowment for the Arts, 2017
 - [Places of Possibility \(POP\): Public ART & Placemaking Toolkit for Rural Communities](#), Jackson Hole Public Art, 2016
- D. Staff.** A full-time, salaried public art coordinator is strongly recommended.

STRATEGY 3: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

While all public art should be accessible, not all public artworks are engaged with. As stated on [page 12](#), we found a direct correlation between rate of engagement and public art impact. In general, the more our public art survey respondents saw, heard, or touched a piece of public art, the more important they felt public art is to various aspects of life. As creative placemaking is defined by outcomes, we suggest the following community engagement tactics to ensure this plan's success.

- A. Media.** Cultivate relationships with the media. Invite them to committee meetings, take them on tours, and give them access to the process with high quality photos, interview opportunities, and press releases that announce key project milestones.
- B. Events.** Offer residents opportunities to develop a relationship with public art through events that activate or compliment the artwork, such as artist or curator talks, poetry and other artmaking workshops inspired by the collection, or an annual bike or road race supporting a local nonprofit— SevenDays® or ACJC, for example—with live music and food trucks at each public art site, similar to Kansas City's VIRTUAL 4.01K Race for Financial Fitness.
- C. Signage.** Make sure all public art signage is presented in English, Spanish, and Braille.

STRATEGY 4: EVALUATION

"[Creative placemaking] should be constructed from evidence on what works and where, and it should include evaluation from the start," write Markusen and Gadwa in *Creative Placemaking*. "Just as environmental research and evaluation have helped us understand how best to remediate past damage and how to avoid future degradation—and with which technologies and conservation practices—arts and cultural placemaking evaluations will ensure more effective outcomes." Suggested short- and long-term evaluation methods include:

- A. Poll.** Measure public opinion of each project by noting community attendance and comments at Public Art Committee meetings and conducting routine and informal surveys such as social media polls.
- B. Report.** Evaluate the efficacy of each year's work plan by conducting an annual review and presenting a year-end report to the City Council that provides updates to city-led public art projects, changes to the city's public art collection, and the status of public art plan implementation.
- C. KPIs.** Use the Placemaking Strategies chart (Appendix A, [page 63](#)) to measure key performance indicators (KPIs) of each placemaking outcome and tactic used every three to five years.
- D. Analyze.** Re-evaluate the need for a collection management policy in five years and examine the efficacy of this master plan by commissioning a five-year update. This update should include community engagement strategies and data collection such as a widely distributed online survey.

APPENDIX

A. Public Art Committee Resources

Placemaking Strategies

OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	TACTIC	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
Creative Placemaking	City Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install eye-catching artworks on or around city gateways • Install a world-class artwork • Install artwork by a regionally popular or world-renowned artist • Install a concentration of artworks throughout the city • Create a niche artwork collection • Create a public art/cultural tourism or branding campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved perception of the city's overall image in Merriam's Community Survey • Increased correlation between residents working in creative sectors and length of residence • Increased usage of public art images in city communication materials • Designation as an "Artistic Haven" with Kansas Dept of Commerce • Increased usage of campaign tools (hashtags, QR codes, etc)
	Wayfinding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install eye-catching artworks on or around city gateways • Enlist artists to create new gateway markers on major arterials • Paint street murals on crosswalks or bump outs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved perception of the city's overall image in Merriam's Community Survey • Increased footfall at gateways with public art • Vehicular speed reduction at gateways with public art • Increased usage of campaign tools (hashtags, QR codes, etc)
	Neighborhood Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enlist artists to create neighborhood signage that reflects its unique character • Install a public artwork in a city park that reflects the nearby neighborhood's unique character 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of neighborhoods with public artwork • Increased footfall in neighborhoods with public art
	Gathering Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install public artworks in city gathering places • Develop one-off or recurring public cultural programming in city gathering places 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved perception of Merriam's maintenance and preservation of historic downtown in Merriam's Community Survey • Increased number of city gathering places with public art • Increased footfall in city gathering places with public art
	History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install public artworks in city gathering places • Develop one-off or recurring public cultural programming in city gathering places 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased usage of Merriam's Otocast app

OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	TACTIC	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
Community Development	Health & Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paint street murals on crosswalks or bump outs • Install artist-designed bus shelters, bike racks, benches, water fountains, trash baskets, and other functional public artworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased automobile, bike, and pedestrian road accidents and collisions at those locations • Vehicular speed reduction at street locations with public art • Improved satisfaction with public safety in Merriam's Community Survey • Improved perception of the quality of life in Merriam's Community Survey
	Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop one-off or recurring public cultural programming • Plan a temporary public art festival • Install an educational artwork • Install an interactive artwork • Install a community-made artwork • Install art in unconventional places 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of people who are engaging with public art • Improved perception of the quality of life in Merriam's Community Survey • Improved satisfaction with arts and culture programs in Merriam's Community Survey
	Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frame "public art" in a more expansive and culturally accessible way • Commission a public artwork by an Indigenous artist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in culturally diverse residents • Increased diversity of artists applying to Merriam's public art opportunities • Increased diversity of those who are engaging with public art

OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	TACTIC	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
Economic Development	Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install a world-class artwork • Install artwork by a regionally popular or world-renowned artist • Install a concentration of artworks throughout the city • Create a niche artwork collection • Create a public art/cultural tourism or branding campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased direct visitor spending • Increase in the quantity of overnight visitors as well as their length of stay • Increased transient guest tax collected • Designation as an “Artistic Haven” with Kansas Dept of Commerce • Increased usage of campaign tools (hashtags, QR codes, etc.)
	Property Redevelopment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install a public artwork in/on an underutilized, vacant, or blighted property • Develop one-off or recurring public cultural programming in/on an underutilized, vacant, or blighted property • Approve percent for art ordinance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased property sales • Increased property redevelopment projects • Improved perception of Merriam’s maintenance and preservation of historic downtown in Merriam’s Community Survey • Improved perception of how the city is planning new development/redevelopment in Merriam’s Community Survey
	Business Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install an eye-catching artwork on or around a commercial property • Develop one-off or recurring public cultural programming in an underutilized area • Grant program for businesses to install public art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased in-person sales at established businesses • Increased footfall in underutilized areas • Increased business creation • Increase in Merriam-based jobs • Improved perception of Merriam’s maintenance and preservation of historic downtown in Merriam’s Community Survey
	Creative Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install an eye-catching artwork on or around city gateways • Create a public art/cultural tourism or branding campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in residents working in creative sectors • Increased worker outflow • Increase in Merriam-based artists applying to TMAG exhibitions and Merriam’s public art opportunities

Step-by-Step Procurement Process Checklist

ACTION STEP	TASKS	LEAD
Develop a Public Art Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Select a placemaking outcome and site <input type="checkbox"/> Describe framework to pertinent city department(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Create a project plan containing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placemaking outcome • Schedule • Site description/needs • Artist eligibility • Budget • Selection process 	<p>Decision-making: Public Art Committee</p> <p>Administration: Public Art Coordinator</p>
Receive Project Approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Project plan approval: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Art Committee • City Council 	<p>Administration: Public Art Coordinator</p>
Develop a Solicitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Write a formal call for art/RFP/RFQ <input type="checkbox"/> Receive Public Art Committee approval <input type="checkbox"/> Publicize solicitation <input type="checkbox"/> Host information session <input type="checkbox"/> Collect and track responses <input type="checkbox"/> Extend the deadline (if necessary) <input type="checkbox"/> Re-publicize solicitation (if necessary) 	<p>Administration: Public Art Coordinator</p> <p>Support: Communications and Public Engagement</p>
Select semi-finalists/finalists/awardee(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Create RFQ evaluation rubric (if necessary) <input type="checkbox"/> Select semi-finalists and conduct reference checks (if necessary) <input type="checkbox"/> Notify semi-finalists and request RFP (if necessary) <input type="checkbox"/> Create RFP evaluation rubric <input type="checkbox"/> Select finalists <input type="checkbox"/> Notify finalists <input type="checkbox"/> Finalist presentations at a Public Art Committee meeting <input type="checkbox"/> Public Art Committee selects awardee <input type="checkbox"/> Circulate awardee proposal to pertinent city department(s) for technical review <input type="checkbox"/> Awardee proposal approval: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor • City Council 	<p>Decision-making: Public Art Committee</p> <p>Optional decision input: Non-Committee Juror(s)</p> <p>Administration: Public Art Coordinator</p>

Step-by-Step Procurement Process Checklist Cont'd

ACTION STEP	TASKS	LEAD
Enter into contract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate requested adjustments to artist (if applicable) <input type="checkbox"/> Send finalized proposal to Public Art Committee for approval (if applicable) <input type="checkbox"/> Awardee finalized proposal approval: City Council <input type="checkbox"/> Send finalized proposal to city attorney for contract creation <input type="checkbox"/> Distribute contract <input type="checkbox"/> Artist signs and returns contract <input type="checkbox"/> Mayor signs contract <input type="checkbox"/> Send executed contract to artist and City Clerk 	<p>Administration: Public Art Coordinator</p>
Fabricate and install artwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Receive necessary permits and site permissions <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare site (if necessary) <input type="checkbox"/> Artist fabricates artwork <input type="checkbox"/> Artist installs artwork if fabrication occurs off-site <input type="checkbox"/> Install signage <input type="checkbox"/> Repair site (if necessary) <input type="checkbox"/> Confirm landscaping and/or maintenance plan with Public Works <input type="checkbox"/> Collect outstanding documentation from artist 	<p>Administration: Public Art Coordinator</p> <p>Support: Various City Departments</p>
Unveiling and dedication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Plan an unveiling ceremony/event <input type="checkbox"/> Publicize unveiling ceremony/event <input type="checkbox"/> Host unveiling ceremony/event <input type="checkbox"/> Update: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal collection database • City public art webpage • Merriam Visitors Bureau art webpage 	<p>Administration: Public Art Coordinator</p> <p>Support: Communications and Public Engagement</p>
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Create marketing collateral that promotes the artwork <input type="checkbox"/> Include artwork images in city magazines, plans, email newsletters, and other informational materials <input type="checkbox"/> Include artwork images on city banners, kiosks, and other wayfinding signage <input type="checkbox"/> Include artwork images on advertisements, brochures, postcards, social media posts, and other promotional materials 	<p>Administration: Various City Departments</p> <p>Support: Public Art Coordinator</p>

Sample RFP Evaluation Rubric

CRITERION	5 POINTS	4 POINTS	3 POINTS	2 POINTS	1 POINT
Application Artist's proposal is complete					
Site Artwork utilizes the site in a dynamic and holistic way.					
Durability Artwork can withstand site conditions such as weather or physical engagement.					
Placemaking Outcome(s) Artwork addresses/meets required placemaking outcome(s).					
Feasibility Artist's fabrication, installation, landscaping, and maintenance plans are reasonable and feasible.					
Budget Artist's fabrication, installation, landscaping, and maintenance budgets are within project budget range.					
Schedule Artist's fabrication and installation schedule is within project timeline.					
Eligibility Artist meets all eligibility requirements.					
Content Artwork content is not inappropriate, political, sexual, religious, an endorsement, an advertisement, or illegal.					
Quality Overall gut reaction which may be based on artistry, excellence, originality, innovation, sophistication, vision, etc. as defined by the juror.					
Total _____ out of 50.					

- 5 points = exceeds criterion expectation
- 4 points = meets criterion expectation
- 3 points = somewhat meets criterion expectation
- 2 points = does not meet criterion expectation
- 1 point = not included in the application

Sample Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is public art?

Public art is self-expression in any media, including visual arts, literature, performance, events, and experimental works, that is created for the benefit of the general public.

If I want to install a publicly visible artwork on private property, do I need to apply through the Public Art Committee?

No. However, any publicly visible artwork on private property must adhere to Merriam's Code of Ordinances, particularly [Chapter 53: Signs and Other Advertising](#). According to section 53-35, "works of fine art, when not displayed in conjunction with a commercial enterprise (nor display a commercial message), which enterprise may benefit direct commercial gain from such display," may be considered a sign or other device that is exempt from city permit requirements. For additional questions about regulations pertaining to privately owned but publicly accessible artworks, please contact Merriam's Community Development Department.

Do you accept rolling applications? Can I submit a proposal for my own public art project on city property?

Unfortunately, we do not have a process in place to review unsolicited applications or donations at this time. Please contact the public art coordinator to discuss further.

What if I have an idea for a public art project?

The Public Art Committee would be happy to hear your suggestions for future public art projects. Please email your idea along with suggested location, placemaking outcome, and other details to the public art coordinator and, if you'd like, they will work with you to present your idea at a future Public Art Committee meeting.

Do you fund short-term temporary and long-term temporary artworks or only permanent projects?

Public art projects may be temporary, semi-permanent, or permanent. Please check the call for art, RFP, or RFQ for criteria and eligibility.

Do you offer funding for public art projects?

Yes. Please check the call for art, RFP, or RFQ for project budget and details.

What if I'm not ready to complete and/or submit an application?

We are happy to answer any questions you may have about a solicitation. Email the public art coordinator with your questions, or attend a Public Art Committee meeting, held the second Thursday of every month at 5:30pm. We will do our best to help!

What criteria do you use to evaluate an application?

The Public Art Committee will develop a unique evaluation rubric with each call for art, RFP, or RFQ which will contain both placemaking and operational criteria. Please check the solicitation for specifics. However, the committee encourages all applicants to submit proposals that align with our mission, vision, and values:

Mission: To participate with Merriam residents, visitors, and artists to facilitate connections that generate opportunities to appreciate the community in new ways

Vision: A future in which Merriam is identified by arts and culture

Values: Engagement – Community – Beautification

What happens after my proposal is approved?

An approval may be granted with condition(s) that require you to take additional actions or make adjustments to your proposal. We will inform you of any other city departments, boards, or committees you may need to speak with relating to public safety, parks and recreation, community development, or tourism. We will also let you know of contract or insurance requirements you will need to meet before you begin fabrication and/or installation.

I've never made a public artwork or project, but I'd like to. How can I learn more about making public art?

[InterUrban ArtHouse](#) in nearby Overland Park provides educational trainings and professional development opportunities to regional artists. Additionally, there are lots of resources available online, including [Arts U](#) from Americans for the Arts, various materials and templates from [GYST](#), and two specific workbooks created by Springboard for the Arts and made available at [ArtWorksKC](#):

1. [*A Handbook for Artists Working In Community*](#), Springboard for the Arts
2. [*Work of Art: Business Skills for Artists*](#)

Listings

Advertise Public Art Solicitations

Regional

- ArtsKC: <https://artskc.org/resources/#calls>
- InterUrban ArtHouse: info@interurbanarthouse.org
- Kansas City Art Institute: contact [Raechell Smith](#), Director & Curator of Artspace
- Kansas City Artists Coalition: www.kansascityartistscoalition.org
- KCMO Public Art Opportunity email list: contact [James Martin](#), Public Art Administrator
- Mid-America Arts Alliance: communications@maaa.org
- Springboard for the Arts: springboardforthearts.org/opportunities
- Forecast: [Artist Opportunities](#)

National

- Americans for the Arts' PAN Listserv: [Public Art Opportunities](#)
- Art Deadlines List: artdeadlineslist.com
- Call for Entry (CaFÉ): www.callforentry.org
- CODAworx: www.codaworx.com
- PublicArtist: www.publicartist.org
- TheArtList: www.theartlist.com

Artist Directories

- [ArtsKC Artist Directory](#)
- [Charlotte Street Artist Registry](#)
- [Kansas Mural & Public Art Roster](#)
- [Kansas Touring Artist Roster](#)
- [Wichita Public Art Registry](#)

Potential Partners

Arts and Cultural Institutions

- [Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art](#), Kansas City, MO
- [Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art](#), Kansas City, MO
- [UMKC Gallery of Art](#), Kansas City, MO
- [Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art](#), Overland Park, KS
- [Johnson County Arts and Heritage Center](#), Overland Park, KS
- [Spencer Museum of Art](#), Lawrence, KS

Colleges and Universities

- [Kansas City Art Institute](#), Kansas City, MO
- [University of Missouri](#)—Kansas City, Kansas City, MO
- [Johnson County Community College](#), Overland Park, KS
- [Haskell Indian Nations University](#), Lawrence, KS
- [University of Kansas](#), Lawrence, KS

Listings Cont'd

Cultural Resource Organizations

- [The Arts Council of Johnson County](#), Overland Park, KS
- [InterUrban ArtHouse](#), Overland Park
- [Kansas City Artists Coalition](#), Kansas City, MO
- [ArtsKC](#), Kansas City, MO

Marketing and Promotions

- [Johnson County Kansas Heritage Foundation](#), Olathe, KS
- [Johnson County Park & Recreation District](#), Shawnee Mission, KS
- [Johnson County Library](#), Overland Park, KS
- [Kansas City Regional Destination Alliance](#)
- [Northeast Kansas Tourism](#)

Regional Municipal Public Art Committees/Commissions

Johnson County

- De Soto: [De Soto Arts in Public Places](#)
- Leawood: [Leawood Arts Council](#)
- Lenexa: [Lenexa Arts Council](#)
- Olathe: [Olathe Public Art Committee](#)
- Overland Park: [Friends of Overland Park Arts](#)
- Prairie Village: [Prairie Village Arts Council](#)
- Roeland Park: [Roeland Park Arts Advisory Committee](#)
- Shawnee: [Shawnee Public Arts Task Force](#)

Other

- Hays, KS: [Hays Arts Council](#)
- Lawrence, KS: [Lawrence Cultural Arts Commission](#)
- Wichita, KS: [Wichita Division of Arts and Cultural Services](#)

B. Community Resources

How do I advocate for public art in my neighborhood?

Reach out to the public art coordinator or attend a Public Art Committee meeting to make suggestions about future project locations and/or placemaking outcomes.

How do I share my opinions about a potential public art project?

All Public Art Committee meetings are open to the public. Committee members would love your feedback, especially if you intend to provide actionable recommendations, about any proposed public art project.

How do I advocate for public art along I-35?

Work with your state representatives to establish a review of the Kansas DOT Non-Highway Use of Right-Of-Way Policy that would allow public art in safe places in state highway layouts.

Are artists and their artworks valuable to our community?

Yes! According to the 2023 [Arts & Economic Prosperity 6 report](#) produced by Americans for the Arts:

1. In Johnson County, the [nonprofit arts and culture] sector generated \$38.5 million in economic activity during 2022—\$15.4 million in spending by arts and culture organizations and an additional \$23.1 million in event-related expenditures by their audiences. That economic activity supported 676 jobs, provided \$21.7 million in personal income to residents, and generated \$6.1 million in tax revenue to local, state, and federal governments.
2. In Johnson County, nonprofit arts and culture organizations spent an estimated \$15.4 million which supported 395 jobs and generated \$2.6 million in local, state, and federal government revenue.
3. Arts and culture drives commerce to local businesses. When people attend a cultural event, they often make an outing of it...In Johnson County, attendees spend \$35.40 per person per event, beyond the cost of admission. These dollars represent vital income for local merchants and a value-add with which few industries can compete.
4. In Johnson County, 30.7% of attendees are nonlocal visitors who traveled from outside Johnson County; they spend an average of \$54.64. Additionally, 82.4% of nonlocal attendees reported that the primary purpose of their visit was specifically to attend the performance, event, exhibit, venue, or facility where they were surveyed.
5. A vibrant arts and culture community keeps local residents—and their discretionary dollars—in the community. When attendees were asked what they would have done if the event where they were surveyed had not been available, 64.4% of attendees who live in Johnson County said they would have “traveled to a different community to attend a similar arts or cultural activity.”

City Council

Ward 1

Jacob Laha
Term: 2021-2025
jlaha@merriam.org
913-608-7636

Jason Silvers
Term: 2024-2027
jsilvers@merriam.org
913-370-9910

Ward 2

Whitney Yadrich
Term: 2024-2027
wyadrich@merriam.org
913-303-1017

Amy Rider
Term: 2021-2025
arider@merriam.org
913-735-0828

Ward 3

Christine Evans Hands
Term: 2021-2025
chrish@merriam.org
913-384-5340

Bruce Kaldahl
Term: 2024-2027
bkaldahl@merriam.org
913-708-3043

Mayor Bob Pape

Term: 2021-2025
bpape@merriam.org 913-707-9316

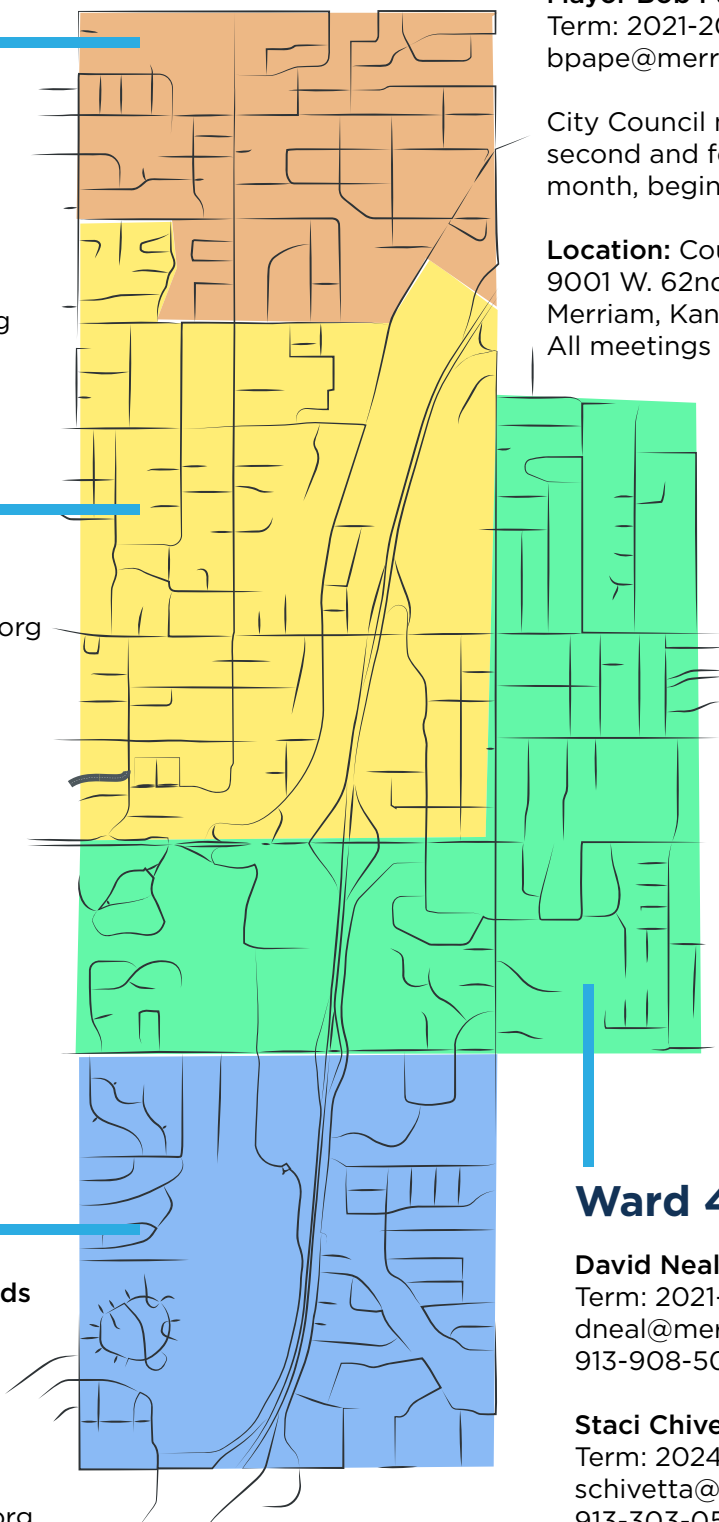
City Council meetings are held the second and fourth Monday of each month, beginning at 7 p.m.

Location: Council Chambers, City Hall
9001 W. 62nd Street
Merriam, Kansas 66204
All meetings are open to the public

Ward 4

David Neal
Term: 2021-2025
dneal@merriam.org
913-908-5072

Staci Chivetta
Term: 2024-2027
schivetta@merriam.org
913-303-0594



Other Public Officials

JOHNSON COUNTY GOVERNMENT

[Becky Fast](#), 1st District Commissioner

KANSAS STATE GOVERNMENT

Kansas State Senate

[Mike Thompson](#), *District 10*

Kansas State Representative

[Jarrod Ousley](#), *District 24*

Laura Kelly, *Governor*

David Toland, *Lieutenant Governor*

governor.kansas.gov

C. Planning Research

Selected Documents

Merriam Reports and Plans

- *2024 City of Merriam Community Survey Findings Report, 2024*
- *2023 Community Development Report, 2024*
- *Downtown Merriam Corridor Plan: A Planning Sustainable Places Initiative, 2022*
- *Merriam Connected Corridor Plan, 2022*
- *Merriam Comprehensive Plan 2040: Main Report, 2021*
- *Merriam Comprehensive Plan 2040: Existing Conditions Report, 2021*
- *City of Merriam Community Survey Findings Report, 2021*
- *5701 Merriam Drive Committee Report and Recommendations, 2019*
- *The City of Merriam, Kansas Manual of Infrastructure Standards, Revised 2019*
- *2018 Brand Analysis: Defining Just Right, 2018*
- *Upper Turkey Creek Johnson County and Wyandotte County, Kansas, Flood Risk Management Project Feasibility Report with Integrated Environmental Assessment, 2015*
- *South Park Sub-Area Plan, 2007*

Other Research

- *Arts & Economic Prosperity 6: The Economic & Social Impact Study of Nonprofit Arts & Culture Organizations & Their Audiences in Johnson County, 2023*
- *Art in the Right of Way Toolkit, 2022*
- *JCPRD Public Art Plan, 2021*
- *Leawood Public Art Master Plan, 2021*
- *Lawrence, Kansas Outdoor Downtown Sculpture Exhibition, 2021*
- *Market Pulse [Office], Kansas City Year-End, 2020*
- *Merriam Community Center Public Art Project Agreement, June 24, 2019*
- *City of Merriam Ordinance No. 1794, 2019*
- *Kansas Department of Transportation Temporary Non-Highway Use of Right-of-Way Policy, 2019*
- *Merriam Public Art Committee Meeting presentation, October 23, 2018*
- *Public Art Initiative and Project #3 Contract Details, City Council presentation, May 14, 2018*
- *Request For Qualifications (RFQ) for Public Art Consultant: Merriam Community Center, 2018*
- *Request for Proposals Invitation, City of Merriam, KS, October 20, 2017*
- *Olathe City Council Regular Session, Council Agenda Item PS-B3, February 21, 2017*
- *Arts and Economic Prosperity 5: The Economic Impact Study of Nonprofit Arts & Cultural Organizations & Their Audiences in Johnson County, KS, 2017*
- *Overland Park Public Art Master Plan update, 2017*
- *City of Olathe Public Art Master Plan, 2015*
- *Building on Lawrence's Creative Capital: A City-Wide Cultural Plan for Lawrence, Kansas, 2015*
- *Public Art Master Plan: Johnson County, Kansas, 2014*
- *Local Arts Index study research, 2013*
- *Creative Placemaking, 2010*
- *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of the State of Kansas (Webb), 1949*
- *Leawood Public Art: A Guide for the City of Leawood, Kansas (date unknown)*

Interviewees

Gerry Becker, Merriam Public Art Committee
Shawn Bitters, University of Kansas
Staci Chivetta, Merriam City Council
Karen Crane, Merriam Visitors Bureau
Julie Denesha, Merriam Public Art Committee
Bryan Dyer, Merriam Community Development
Chris Engel, Merriam City Administrator
Randy Fine, Merriam Public Works
Jordan Gomez, Merriam Public Art Committee
Christine Evans Hands, Merriam City Council
Angi Hejduk, InterUrban ArtHouse
Caleb Hunt, Merriam Public Works
Celia Kumke, Merriam Public Works
Phil Lammers, Merriam Public Art Committee
Christopher Leitch, Merriam Public Art Committee/Merriam Parks and Recreation Board
Shawn McConnell, Merriam Public Art Committee/Merriam Planning Commission
Bob Pape, Merriam Mayor
E.G. Schempf, Resident
Jan Schoonover, Merriam Public Art Committee
Anna Slocum, Merriam Parks and Recreation
Dave Smothers, Merriam Parks and Recreation
Kort St. Clair, Kansas Department of Transportation
Sarah VanLanduyt, The Arts Council of Johnson County