



REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS FOR JOHNSON CITY, TENNESSEE DOWNTOWN MURAL PROJECT

The Public Art Committee of Johnson City, TN and Blue Plum Gives Back are seeking qualifications from artists or art teams for the commission of a mural to be located on Commerce Street in downtown Johnson City.

ELIGIBILITY: This opportunity is open to all professional artists over the age of 18. Applicants must reside within the United States.

BUDGET: Up to three finalists will be selected to develop design concepts for this project. The total project budget for the selected commission is \$24,000. Each finalist will be paid a \$500 honorarium for his/her design. The selected artist will be paid \$22,500 for the commissioned work. The three finalists will be required to present their proposals to the Selection Committee and will be reimbursed for travel expenses (airfare, car rental, etc.). The selected artist will be responsible for own travel costs, materials, housing, and personal liability insurance when installing the mural. The selected artist will also be responsible for applying an appropriate primer, UV sealant, and anti-graffiti coating to the walls/mural surface. The City of Johnson City will pressure wash the walls and attend to any necessary repairs prior to the installation.

DEADLINE: February 8, 2022 by 4:30 p.m. (Eastern Time)

QUESTIONS: Cheyenne Kumbhare ckumbhare@johnsoncitytn.org 423-975-2706

ABOUT JOHNSON CITY

Johnson City, with an elevation of over 2,000 feet, is located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. It is surrounded by farmland, undulating hills, lush valleys, and many lakes and rivers. Johnson City has an abundance of unspoiled natural beauty and four distinct seasons.

The ninth-largest city in Tennessee, with a population of nearly 67,000, Johnson City was founded in 1856 as "Johnson's Depot" and later became a major rail hub for the Southeast. In 1869, it was incorporated by the State of Tennessee as Johnson City, Tennessee. Johnson City is distinguished as a community that embraces art, the environment, commerce, science, community, and education. It is home to a broad based economy and to East Tennessee State University. The City houses a healthy blend of residents, ranging from college students and young families to those of retirement age. Many locate to the area due to its proximity to the mountains and its pleasant climate.

Downtown Johnson City is in the midst of a revitalization period. In recent years, storm water mitigation efforts prompted the development of two new parks – Founders Park and King Commons – and a commitment to the local food movement spurred the installation of a large farmer’s market pavilion. Craft beer breweries have become increasingly popular as many have located in the downtown area. The City’s two remaining train depots were remodeled, and many other downtown buildings are undergoing restoration. Just a few blocks from downtown, a heavily wooded area known as Tannery Knobs has been transformed into a bike park with trails for people of all ages and skill levels. Public art has also contributed to the ongoing revitalization as artistic elements have been incorporated into many of the newly developed areas downtown.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Lying in the heart of East Tennessee, Johnson City is steeped in a rich musical tradition and history. While some of the city’s earliest sounds are rooted in bluegrass, folk, and mountain music, musicians in the area continue to grow and have embraced a diverse array of genres ranging from rock to hip hop. The city is in close proximity to Bristol, Tennessee, which has become known as the “birthplace of country music”. Following the Bristol Sessions recordings of Appalachian musicians in 1927, several well-known artists were discovered including The Carter Family and Jimmy Rodgers, among others. Though not as notorious, Johnson City was also home to an influential series of bluegrass and folk recordings known as the Johnson City Sessions. These took place in 1928 and 1929 and involved the recording of over 50 musical artists. The “Coo-Coo Bird” by Clarence Ashley and “Down on Penny’s Farm” by the Bentley Boys are examples of noteworthy releases that were made during these sessions. Producer Frank Walker of Columbia Records conducted the sessions, gathering musical acts by placing an advertisement in the newspaper that read, “Can You Sing or Play Old-Time Music?” Years later, the releases from these and other “old-time music” recordings would influence 1950s and 1960s folk musicians such as Doc Watson, Bob Dylan, and Joan Baez.

In 1999, the first Blue Plum Festival was held in Johnson City to celebrate the region’s musical roots and the city’s downtown. The two-day annual event takes place in June and features a variety of musical acts on multiple stages throughout the downtown. In addition, attendees enjoy art and craft vendors, a 5K race, and a children’s area, among other activities.

Another side of the Johnson City area’s artistic history centers on Appalachian craftwork, which involves cultural traditions that still survive to this day. Quilting emerged as one of the most prominent of these traditions, with families originally creating quilts more for their utility than their artistic value. In the Appalachian region, quilting methods were influenced by Scottish, Irish, German, Native American, Amish, and Quaker styles and patterns. Geometric forms were common in many of these patterns, and the quilt designs would often tell a story related to family history or local events. In the early 1900s in Appalachia, the “patchwork” or “piecing” method was very common, and quilters would save any usable fabric scraps to incorporate into their quilts. When money was scarce, cloth feed sacks and flour sacks were used for quilting material. Manufacturers began to realize that their less fortunate customers were using the sacks for this purpose, and some began selling sacks printed with flowers or colorful patterns. Patchwork quilts can also be appliqued rather than pieced together; a process that involves stitching a smaller piece of fabric on top of a larger one.

Though quilting was an activity born of necessity, it also served other purposes. Women would often quilt together in groups of family and friends, with quilting having a large impact on the social lives of those who participated. Local quilting clubs became important community organizations. Over time, quilt making evolved into more than a means of keeping warm; it became a specialized craft that provided makers with an opportunity for self-expression and artistic accomplishment.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The mural should celebrate the city's musical and artistic heritage by showcasing bluegrass musicians, bluegrass instruments, and quilts of particular patterns. The design should include elements reminiscent of the 1930s era as this is the period in which bluegrass music began to blossom. Musicians featured in the mural should be ethnically diverse; they should not be recognizable and should not reference any specific musicians or people. Instruments may include the fiddle, guitar, banjo, mandolin, dulcimer, and bass. The quilts included in the design should incorporate at least two of the following quilt patterns: pickle dish, grandmother's flower garden, string, double wedding ring, and floral applique. Quilt colors should be appropriate for the 1930s time period; quilts made in this era were often constructed from scraps that were pastel or moderately bright in color.

A link to a photo compilation of bluegrass musicians, instruments, and select quilts is available at: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1wbbmxHHR0jNwNpWlwjWbu4TyXIkBY6dw?usp=sharing>. Finalists for this project are encouraged to conduct further research into Johnson City's musical and artistic history.

MURAL SITE





The mural site is located on the **two walls** that overlook a downtown parking area adjacent to the city’s Founders Park Pavilion in downtown Johnson City. Each year in June, the Blue Plum Festival is held in the parking lot and surrounding areas, making this the ideal location for a bluegrass/Appalachian craft themed mural. The site lies between two downtown parks and two of the main downtown streets, and it is highly visible to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The upper wall is set back from the lower wall, and each is located on a different building (see side view photo above). The lower wall is approximately 65 feet x 13 feet and the upper wall is approximately 65 feet x 12 feet. There are five windows within the upper wall with 8 feet of space between each window. The upper wall is higher on the left side and lower on the right, beginning at approximately 14 feet on the left and declining to 10 feet on the right. A green pipe sits on the left side of the upper wall, and this structure should also be incorporated into the mural design. The total square footage for both walls is approximately 1,535 square feet, excluding the windows.

SELECTION CRITERIA

A Public Art Selection Committee will review the qualifications of applicant artists and make recommendations to the Johnson City Public Art Committee. The Selection Committee includes artists, arts advocates, curators, administrators, project partners, and other arts and community development specialists. Their selections will be based on the following criteria:

- **Artistic excellence as demonstrated in 10 digital images of the artist(s) previous work**
- **Evidence of working in the mural field on large masonry surfaces**
- **Experience working on collaborative community projects**
- **Experience working on large scale projects**
- **Willingness to meet all contractual guidelines**
- **The use of content appropriate for all audiences**

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submit a digital portfolio:

- **Cover letter/letter of intent**
- **Resume**
- **10 digital images of previous artwork**
- **Contact information for 3 professional references**

Submit a digital pack at <https://icpublicart.com/commerce-street-mural-project/>

ANTICIPATED TIMELINE

- **Deadline for submissions: February 8, 2022 by 4:30 p.m. (Eastern Time)**
- **Notification of three finalists: February 22, 2022**
- **Final design submission/presentation: March 22, 2022**
- **Final artist selection: March 29, 2022**

Please note: Installation of the mural will be scheduled in consultation with the selected artist. The preferred installation period is May/June 2022.