



CGF Meeting Feedback Form

Submitted On:

Jul 21, 2025, 09:39AM CDT

City of Grand Forks

Meeting Type:	City Council Meeting
Full Name	First Name: Liz Last Name: Legerski
Full Address	Street Address: City: Grand Forks State: ND Zip: 58201
Agenda Item Number / Topic:	5.1 School for the Blind mural
Comments:	<p>Dear Mayor Bochenski and City Council members,</p> <p>My name is Liz Legerski and I am writing to ask that the City Council work with the School for the Blind to approve the mural that has been painted on one of their buildings.</p> <p>I have lived in Grand Forks for 15 years. Although I live in Ward 4, I work in Ward 1 near the School for the Blind. My children and I also have friends that live near the school, so we are frequently in that neighborhood. We also have friends in this community with significant vision impairments. It has been such a joy to pass by that mural in recent weeks. It has brought attention to an important school and population in our community that may be invisible to many people and it really adds something of beauty and value to that neighborhood.</p> <p>I am a sociologist by training and so often engage in community research, and I wanted to share with you some of what existing research shows about the impact of community art, and specifically murals, on neighborhood communities. A number of years ago, "The Porch Light Initiative" was launched in Philadelphia to erect large-scale murals in distressed neighborhoods to address stigmatized issues. These murals depicted local experiences and concerns. The goal of the program was to build community connectedness, understanding, resilience, and reduce stigma.</p> <p>The Yale University Medical School then studied the impact of these murals in three of these communities over several years and what they found was pretty neat - they found significant positive effects on the neighborhoods where these murals were installed. Within one year, residents living within one mile of a newly installed mural reported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater collective efficacy, including social cohesion and trust among neighbors as well as an increase in perceptions of informal

social control.

- They also reported an increase in neighborhood aesthetic quality, a better walking environment, ratings of specific buildings went up, as well as perceptions of neighborhood safety.
- And they also documented a decrease in feelings of stigma toward individuals with mental health or substance abuse challenges.

The researchers went back again after almost two years, and they were able to demonstrate these same positive outcomes. When the researchers talked to the residents, community members shared how they felt about the murals, validating the survey findings, by describing how the murals:

- 1) Enhanced the neighborhood aesthetically; and
- 2) Lessened neighborhood decay;
- 3) They also found them to be inspiring and emotionally uplifting; and
- 4) Felt that they assisted in building community (see the Community Mural Arts Porch Light Evaluation).

Other studies have similarly shown that public art makes spaces feel more cared for, makes them attractive and inviting for both residents and visitors, and thus indirectly increases feelings of safety. This impacts people both in terms of their mental health and also in terms of their physical well-being (University of Florida Creating Healthy Communities: Arts + Public Health in America initiative).

What a waste of resources and time it would be to remove something that has the potential to raise awareness about such an important school in our community. What if this mural could help build greater empathy and reduce stigma towards the blind? What if this mural could help increase a sense of neighborhood connectedness, lift the moods of passersby, reduce perceptions of decay, and foster a greater sense of community pride? Previous research tells us that this mural could benefit not just the School for the Blind, but also the greater neighborhood community in which the mural sits, and I worry about the message it would send to the faculty, staff, and students of the School for the Blind to erase a mural about their lives and experiences.

My understanding is that when the School for the Blind realized they did not have the proper authorization for the mural they worked earnestly and honestly to correct their mistake. I ask that the City of Grand Forks work with the School for the Blind to find a way to obtain the proper authorization to preserve the mural.

Sincerely,
Liz Legerski



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Meeting Type:	City Council Meeting
Full Name	First Name: Jennifer Last Name: Tarlin
Full Address	Street Address: City: Grand Forks State: ND Zip: 58203
Agenda Item Number / Topic:	5.1 Mural at North Dakota School for the Blind
Comments:	<p>Allow the mural on the wall of the The School for the Blind to remain in place. It is a cheerful image that brightens our neighborhood and is broadly supported by the majority of residents who live in the area, many of whom showed up at the recent Planning and Zoning meeting to provide scores of reasons for preserving it as well as published data from peer-reviewed journals documenting the positive benefits of public art in residential neighborhoods. In contrast, the reasons considered more relevant by four of the six members of the planning and zoning committee, were based on bureaucratic issues arising from the failure of the School for the Blind to submit a request to paint its wall and comply with ordinances of which it was unaware, undocumented references to phone calls and/or studies purported to object, and undocumented references to the possibility that the mural might impact property values negatively. (Contradictory credible empirical data was provided by community speakers that challenged that assumption.) As far as I know, the City Council member who purports to represent my neighborhood (near the site of the mural) had never held a single public meeting to invite her constituents to share their thoughts on the matter when she took it upon herself to berate the artist and dismantle the project. I note that Mr. Gaustad has provided a method in the final paragraph of his July 9th memorandum to address the mural issue at this time, and that makes a lot of sense to me: "An alternative the Planning & Zoning Commission and the City Council may wish to consider is to postpone a decision on this matter to allow for my office to work with the planning Department to develop an amendment to City Code 18-0301(3)(M) that would provide more flexibility and a lower threshold than is required for a variance or conditional use permit..." Everyone (myself included) was sorry that the School for the Blind inadvertently broke the rules. Bureaucratic intransigence on this issue, however, does not serve our community well.</p>