

FEATURED

Funding for Roswell Arts Fund fluctuates during pandemic

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'Sentience' by David Landis currently resides in the heart of Canton Street. Roswell Arts Fund has partnered with the Downtown Development Authority to raise funds to purchase this sculpture.

Lindsay Moscarello

Local nonprofit Roswell Arts Fund received a dramatic cut in funding requests from Roswell as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the pandemic progressed, Roswell mayor and council have had to freeze and cut funding requests for Fiscal Year 2021. Roswell Arts Fund originally submitted funding requests to City of Roswell in December 2019. At that time, the total amount requested was \$250,000. A few months later and in a very different environment, the nonprofit asked for \$220,000.

Of that, only \$50,000 was approved in June, with the option to request more in quarterly reviews.

“While we always understood the challenges faced by the administration, the 78% cut posed an existential threat to our organization,” Roswell Arts Fund Executive Director Ghila Sanders said. “Even with a solid fundraising plan, that void was too deep to be filled, particularly in a year when foundation giving has changed and local businesses have struggled so much.”

Roswell held an open forum and city council meeting Nov. 30, where Roswell Arts Fund remained a popular topic. During the open forum, several residents spoke about the nonprofit’s importance to the city.

“Mental health is a struggle for all of us and Roswell Art Fund programs are public art, outdoor programs and other COVID- safe activities that uplift us, reduce stress and promote wellbeing,” Advisory Board member Kate Baar said during the open forum. “The pandemic hit the art community disproportionately hard and Roswell Arts Fund supports artists and gives them places show their work.”

Without additional funding, Baar said, Roswell Arts Fund is in danger of losing all that momentum it’s painstakingly built up over the last few years.

For these reasons, Sanders said she and the nonprofit went into the Nov. 30 city council meeting with significant concerns. During the meeting, council members voted to provide \$40,000 for Roswell Arts Fund’s project, ArtAround Roswell. ArtAround Roswell began in 2016 and brings public art sculptures to the city. This year’s project features 10 permanent pieces and 10 temporary pieces.

“As we are spending more time outdoors, public art offers a sense of hope, comfort, and joy, and now, more than ever, we need those moments of discovery and reflection,” council member Marie Willsey said. “Roswell residents of of all ages enjoy interacting with the sculptures and posing for photos, and seeing art as a part of the landscape often encourages viewers to consider their world from a different perspective. The ArtAround sculpture tour is an important opportunity for us to invest in and support the social, mental, and economic health of our Roswell community.”

Sanders said they are grateful to have now received support for their flagship program, Art Around Roswell, and truly appreciate Mayor and City Council’s commitment to their partnership.

“By no means are we out of the water, this year we have been running on flexibility, and keep pivoting to serve the community as needed while also honoring our commitments under our MOU with the City to advance the arts in Roswell and contribute to the city’s economic development,” Sanders said. “We are humbled by the community response to our work, and will keep pushing forward.”