



City of Grass Valley City Council Agenda Action Sheet

Title: City-sponsored mural project at the Hwy 49 Underpass

CEQA: CEQA Exemption Class 1

Recommendation: Receive and File.

Prepared by: Amy Wolfson, City Planner

Council Meeting Date: 5/27/2025

Date Prepared: 5/22/2025

Agenda: Consent

Background Information:

The downtown landscape in the location of the Highway 49 underpass, at the intersections of South Auburn and Neal Streets, is visually appealing from multiple directions; however, the industrial appearance of the overpass in that area isn't consistent with downtown's charm. Staff examined how this could be addressed and identified that the overpass and its abutments are an ideal location for a "Transportation Art" project. Police Department staff spearheaded the idea and solicited mural concepts for the overpass abutments from local artists.

At their November 12, 2024 regular meeting, City Council directed staff to proceed with the process of a transportation art project application and directed staff to put the renderings and application through the City's mural process.

Project Description:

This art project seeks to have murals painted on the overpass abutments and, in some areas, the underside of the Hwy 49 overpass. Each abutment would be painted by a different artist, each of whom is a local artist who resides and works in western Nevada County. Details of the proposed art can be found in the attached document, along with a bio of each artist.

Caltrans Regulatory framework: The Caltrans Art Program includes the following guidelines to ensure safety and function:

- Must celebrate community identity,
- Must be scaled appropriately, and allow safe maintenance per Caltrans rules.
- Cannot include text, mimic traffic devices or use reflective/glaring finishes.
- Cannot include moving elements, simulated motion, or symbols like flags and logos (beyond limited sponsor recognition)
- Cannot include designs impacting structures, drainage, or sightlines.
- Must be durable and low-maintenance,
- Must be fully funded by sponsors for their lifecycle.
- Painting on structures needs Division of Maintenance approval to avoid hiding cracks or stressing bridges.

City regulatory framework: Mural regulations are outlined in the Sign Ordinance, in section 17.38.080 (F) of the City Municipal Code. Murals that illustrate the local setting, history, or cultural significance are encouraged. The review authority must find that the “colors, placement, and size of the mural are visually compatible with the structure's architecture, and that the mural will serve to enhance the aesthetics of the city”

City Approval: The mural proposal followed the City’s adopted process for murals as outlined in section 17.38.080(F) of the municipal code. The Development Review Committee reviewed the project on May 13, 2025 with a recommendation to approve the project. The planning commission approved the project as presented at their May 20, 2025 regular meeting, and made a recommendation that the two pillars with veteran plaques affixed to them be reserved for mural work that honors veteran service.



At corner of Hansen Way and So. Auburn Street



At corner of Hansen Way and Colfax Ave

Council Goals/Objectives: The mural project supports the 2022 Strategic Plan Update, Goal #1: The City of Grass Vally is dedicated to promoting programs and projects that improve livability and enhance the character and charm of Grass Valley.

Fiscal Impact: N/A

Funds Available: Privately Funded

Account #: N/A

Reviewed by: City Manager

Attachments:

1. Transportation Art Proposal