

CITY OF LAUREL **ARTS COUNCIL**



The Year in Review: January - December 2020

City of Laurel Arts Council
Laurel, Maryland

Annual Report

A Word About 2020

The year 2020 brought unprecedented challenges to our community, as the coronavirus pandemic shuttered businesses, government offices, schools, places of work, and houses of worship. We saw lives and livelihoods lost and felt widespread hardship in all facets of our community. Like other City groups, the Laurel Arts Council (LAC) met the new normal by suspending meetings and delaying projects. At the same time, we realized that the arts could be more critical than ever in providing people a pathway for expression, unity, and healing. Toward that end, we collaborated with other local groups to launch a few carefully chosen projects aimed at easing isolation, fostering creativity, and promoting community.

In 2020 we also bid farewell to our founding chairperson, Kelsey Hutchison, as she moved on to new challenges. Through her skillful, inspired, and always tireless efforts, our fledgling council was able to take off with astonishing speed and achieve impressive results in its first years. Kelsey built the infrastructure of working groups, social media, and project planning and management that is the foundation for all we do now. We thank her and wish her well!

Who We Are

In 2017 Laurel's Mayor and City Council established a City of Laurel Arts Council (LAC) to encourage and invest in visual and performing arts and art education. After a public call for applicants, the City appointed 11 residents to 2- and 3-year terms on the all-volunteer council. Our first meeting was in October 2017. Our liaison to City government is the Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation, aided by the Coordinator for the Department of Economic and Community Development. For more information about us, please see <https://www.cityoflaurel.org/boards/commissions/laurel-arts-council>.

Vision To create a vibrant arts community that enriches the lives of those who live, work, and visit here.

Mission To encourage the growth of the arts to benefit all people in the City, to organize the display of art in public places throughout the City, to provide diverse and engaging arts programming, and to increase advocacy and opportunities for local artists and arts organizations.

Goals To support and advocate for the arts and to develop arts programs, outreach, and partnerships that:

- Cultivate participation in the arts across ages, races, cultures, and other facets of Laurel's diversity.
- Promote artistic expression and achievement in all forms of visual and performing arts.
- Support life-long learning through the arts, particularly in arts education for young people.
- Ensure that the arts are accessible to every resident and foster awareness of arts resources.

Approach To develop arts programs and events by building partnerships with government, business, education, community organizations, and residents within and outside the City.

- **Work within Laurel** to inventory and build on existing resources and develop exhibits and events. Synchronize with the City's planned events, commercial development, and use of open spaces. Draw on the unique features of Laurel as a source for art themes and inspiration: The City's extraordinary diversity, its deep historical roots, and its landscape of river, lakes, parks, and preserves.
- **Reach outside Laurel** to arts organizations in neighboring cities to exchange ideas and coordinate schedules for events. Seek support from arts sponsors in Prince George's County and the State of Maryland. Draw on national resources, for example, those offered by Americans for the Arts.

Meetings The Laurel Arts Council meets the second Tuesday evening of each month. During the coronavirus pandemic, meetings are held virtually through the City's online meeting platforms. Otherwise, meetings convene at the Laurel Municipal Center, 8103 Sandy Spring Road, Laurel, MD 20707. The public is welcome to attend. For information about meetings or related matters, please call the Department of Parks and Recreation at 301-725-7800 or email parks@laurel.md.us.

What We Accomplished in 2020

The LAC was closely involved with the City of Laurel's plans to celebrate its 150th anniversary throughout 2020. But with the advent of the coronavirus pandemic, the physical closure of government offices in mid-March, and the cancellation of live events for Laurel's anniversary, we put most of our planned projects on hold. We limited our activities to those we could carry out virtually.

We Participated in City Events

The LAC traditionally participates in City-sponsored events to tell people about our programs and to connect with other groups. In 2020, we took part in events up to the mid-March shutdown.

- **City of Laurel Open House (March 1, 2020)** Our members staffed a table for this annual event.
- **City of Laurel 150th Anniversary: Laurel High School International Night (March 6, 2020)** International Night showcases the cultures and nationalities represented by Laurel High School students through dance, drama, music, and fashion. The LAC nominated this showcase for the City's 150th Anniversary calendar, where it became a passport event. LAC members attended and publicized highlights from International Night.



Laurel High School International Night – a feast of music, dance, and costume from five continents, celebrating the diverse cultures of students and their families.

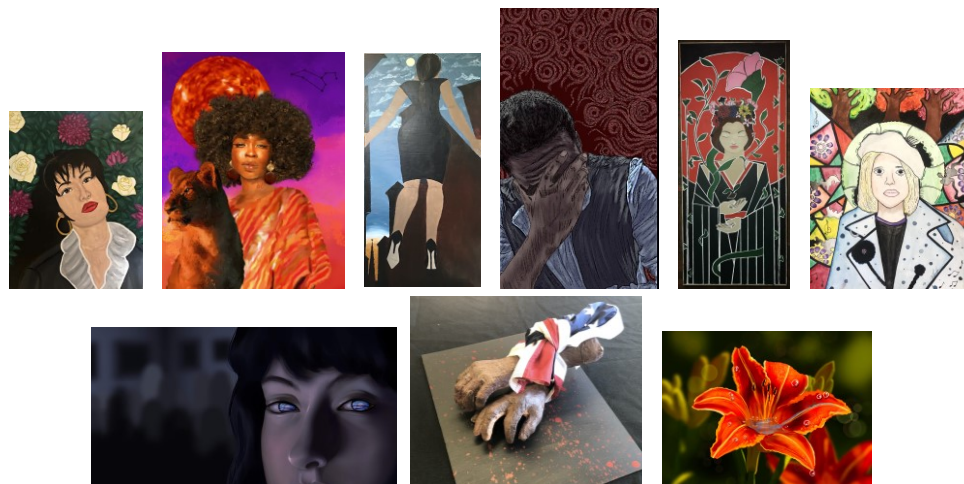
We Organized Arts Education and Public Art Projects

As part of our commitment to arts education, we continued to work with local schools and made them partners in creating art for the public. After the pandemic set in, we were able to complete some school projects on line. Others we hope to resume later.

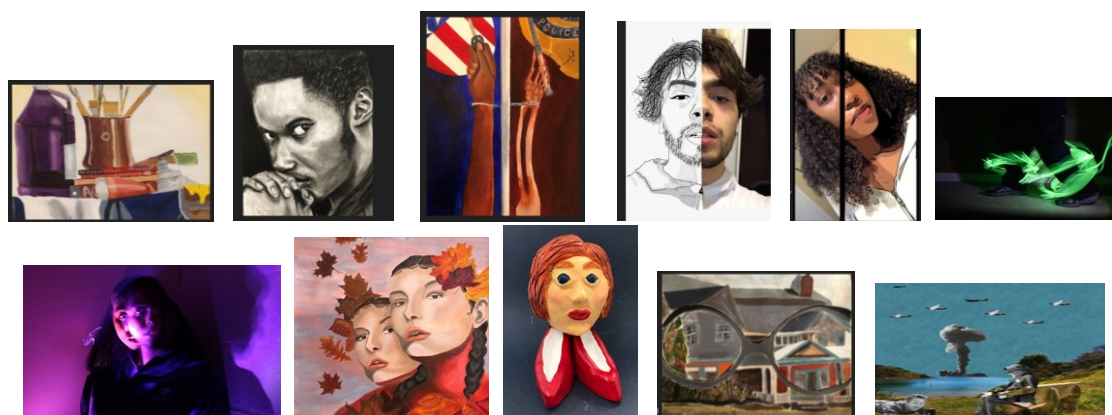
- **Elementary School Art Posters.** We collaborated with two elementary schools in Laurel -- Scotchtown Hills and Laurel Elementary -- to have children create art posters on the theme “What I like about my hometown.” By early March we had distributed an initial set of poster boards and crayons to schools and teamed with art teachers to develop prompts to spark children’s imaginative responses. We hope to continue this project later.
- **Murals.** For the City’s 150th Anniversary, we designed and sponsored mobile murals.
 - **Multicultural Mural - Laurel High School.** We partnered with Laurel High School to create a mobile mural on the theme “Laurel is Inclusive” – a key concept for the 150th celebration. Laurel High art teacher Eric Butters engaged two art classes to each design and produce a mural with art motifs depicting the heritage cultures of the school’s diverse student body. The twin murals were to be displayed at the City’s planned September 2020 festival and moved to other locations during the 150th celebration year. Laurel TV captured the students’ creative thinking and mural making progress along with interpretations by the teacher and the Laurel Arts Council member who worked with students:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F36GhC-BbIU>
 - **Multilingual We-Are-Laurel mural.** To complement Laurel High’s multicultural murals, we made blueprints for a multi-panel, community-fashioned mural proclaiming “We Are Laurel” in the specific languages and scripts used by Laurel’s residents. This was to be displayed at the City’s planned September 2020 festival.
- **Virtual Art Galleries - Laurel High and St. Vincent Pallotti High Schools (May, 2020)**

We traditionally mount public exhibits of artwork by Laurel students to shine a light on their talents. In the 2020 pandemic year, we moved the exhibits on line. We mounted on Facebook two virtual galleries of paintings, sculpture, and ceramics: one by art students from Laurel High and one by art students from Pallotti High -- almost 120 works in all -- selected by teachers for quality and originality.

These galleries were widely shared by the City of Laurel and other organizations. They received more likes, shares, and happy comments than any other of our Facebook posts to that date. Graduating seniors who participated received letters of thanks signed by City of Laurel Mayor, Craig Moe.

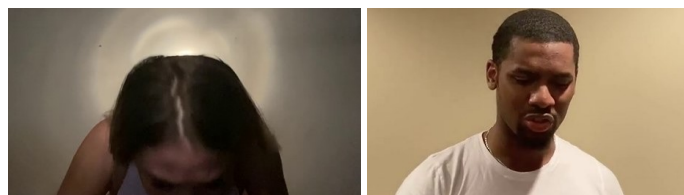


*Selections from the **Laurel High School 2020 virtual art gallery**, from the Laurel Arts Council Facebook exhibit.*



*Selections from the **St. Vincent Pallotti High School 2020 virtual art gallery**, exhibited by the Laurel Arts Council.*

- **Virtual Theater - St. Vincent Pallotti High School (May, 2020)** We also moved the showcase of Pallotti drama on line, which we sponsored live in 2019. We shared performances of two advanced theater students reciting monologues from Shakespeare plays, recorded individually from home, provided by the Pallotti High School Theater Department. Public response was appreciative, recognizing the emotional power of these performances in the height of the coronavirus shutdown: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vc3eotnNS9Wnt9E3LiM5Yb-Z_u2Oo8SN/view?fbclid=IwAR1ocs1BOB9-MfFvZEg-WrIN8NAiTDC2NzWmUan-IiAJKmWkNZluLhc4WME



***St. Vincent Pallotti High School Drama** – students perform monologues from Shakespeare’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”(left) and “Twelfth Night”(right), aired on Facebook by the Laurel Arts Council.*

- **Shakespeare in the Parks, *Macbeth: A Radio Drama*, Prince George’s County Department of Parks & Recreation (Summer, 2020)** We shared on our social media the county’s audio production of Shakespeare’s classic play, *Macbeth*, an exclusive release that replaced the customary live summer performances. This release was notable in conveying not just the actors’ utterances but sound effects crucial to listeners’ envisioning of the tragedy.
- **Laurel High School Arts Week (December, 2020)** We attended this virtual pageant of students performing music, dance, and drama and publicized highlights on social media.

We Engaged the Community

- **Department of Parks and Recreation Sidewalk Chalk Art (May-June, 2020)** LAC Members contributed to the City’s collection of sidewalk chalk art -- a Facebook campaign by Laurel Parks and Recreation to inspire residents to safely create public art and messages of hope during the pandemic. LAC members posted photos and videos of chalk art being made and enjoyed, which Laurel Parks and Recreation shared on its social media.



Chalk art created by Laurel Arts Council members to broaden the City of Laurel’s Sidewalk Art Facebook campaign. An artistic hopscotch design, far right, was eagerly employed by neighborhood children.

- **Postcard Project (July-December, 2020)** The Laurel Historical Society initiated a joint project with us to collect people’s personal reflections on the events of 2020. The public was invited to send a postcard responding to the question, “How has your life been affected by the coronavirus pandemic and protests for racial justice?”
 - To reach more people, we presented the question and directions in Spanish. We also left blank postcards for free pick up at the Laurel Municipal Center and posted wiki-how instructions for people to make their own postcards.
 - Heartfelt responses followed, framed as prose, poems, or drawings. We drew a range of ages, from grandparents to local girl scouts. Photos of the cards were displayed on the LAC Facebook page and became part of the Laurel History Museum’s permanent collection documenting the year of the pandemic and the protests for racial justice.



Sample of postcards sent in response to the joint project by the Laurel Historical Society and the Laurel Arts Council (posted on LAC Facebook).

- The postcard campaign became a front page story in the *Laurel Leader*:
<https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/laurel/cng-ll-postcards-history-pg-20201007-aukz5p6q6fhrdphdjcvc2gzmnu-photogallery.html> It was also noted in Laurel TV's Community Spotlight on the Laurel Historical Society Time Capsule:
https://youtu.be/U_LUtDL6KXA

We Were Covered by Local Media

In addition to Laurel TV spots and *Laurel Leader* coverage, we were featured in the inaugural issue of *Voices of Laurel*, a digital newspaper produced by the Laurel History Boys, in Charles Clyburn's "The Lost Art of Storytelling" column:

<https://laurelhistoryboys.files.wordpress.com/2021/01/voices-of-laurel-newspaper-winter-2021-final.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3jEUcuJDkhUCQx0zZ0O7bywYazYQ9JBSUFIoMxZchs-UzbUklJKj24PEo>

We Connected with Other Arts Councils

In 2020 we began talking with arts councils in neighboring towns, such as the long-standing Bowie Arts Committee, and received guidance on seeking grants, instituting public art, and doing community outreach. At the county level, we met with the Prince George's Arts & Humanities Council (PGAHC) Executive Director, Rhonda Dallas, who advised us on the range of county art grants and other resources available for local artists and councils and laid out the steps involved in planning public art. She also linked us with the Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC), where we learned about state art grants to cities and how to apply for them.

With pointers from the PGAHC, we participated in the Prince George's Arts and Culture Study 2020-2021, where our comments will influence the nature and location of place-making art and events around the county.

We Supported Laurel Nonprofits

In addition to our partnership projects, we responded to requests from local nonprofit organizations. For example, we were part of a group advising Venus Theater on installing an outdoor herb garden and art space, and we wrote a letter supporting the Laurel Historical

Society's nomination for the National Medal for Museum Service from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Our Financial Report

Most of our 2020 activities took place online using available social media and City platforms. Our sole expenditures were for materials for two planned Laurel 150th Anniversary projects: (1) Poster boards and crayons for the elementary school art posters, totaling \$58.52, and (2) Gesso hardboard panels for the Laurel High School mobile mural, totaling \$67.21. The grand total expended in 2020 was \$125.73.

We are grateful to the City of Laurel, its departments, the City Council and the Mayor for supporting and guiding us throughout the challenging pandemic year. And we thank the people of Laurel for valuing us and for finding insight and joy through the arts.