



Mural in Cumberland, MD

V I R G I N I A  
**MAIN**  
VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT  
OF HOUSING AND  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
*Street*

Mural Tech Sheet  
June 2023





*Mural in Richmond, VA*



 **FRAZIER ASSOCIATES**  
ARCHITECTURE ■ COMMUNITY DESIGN ■ WAYFINDING  
213 NORTH AUGUSTA STREET, STAUNTON, VA 24401  
PHONE 540.886.6230 ■ [www.frazierassociates.com](http://www.frazierassociates.com)

# Mural Tech Sheet DRAFT

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. Introduction
- II. Ways to Manage Mural Design, Installation, and Maintenance
- III. Sample Mural Guidelines
- IV. Community Examples

## I. Introduction

Murals have become more and more popular in communities of all sizes nationwide. They can animate spaces, tell a community story, create a sense of place, and enliven the experience of a community. As they have become more popular, communities have taken different steps to manage installation, content, and maintenance of murals.

This Mural Tech Sheet has drawn on information gathered from other states and localities that have established mural guidelines. Most of Virginia's Main Street communities are designated historic districts on a national level and some are also locally designated and have architectural review boards. Given these parameters, guidelines specifically developed for historic districts were reviewed with the goal of extracting common approaches to not only the mural design and installation process but also architectural review and appropriateness. It is important to check with the local architectural review board for mural guidance.

Murals in our historic downtowns provide an opportunity to tell the community story whether past history or the current trends in the community. They can be part of a beautification project and be a part of solving the problem of empty spaces on sides and rears of buildings. When done appropriately, murals can help to strengthen a downtown's sense of place. To achieve these goals, there are a number of things to consider when planning for mural installations in downtown. These include:

- Surface materials and preparation for historic buildings and non-historic buildings;
- Location of mural on non-character defining elevations such as side and rear elevations versus primary front elevations;
- Design and content;
- Viewer site lines - how will the mural actually be viewed? This impacts scale, detail, and perspective.



*Bristol VA/TN mural*



*Lynchburg, VA parking garage mural*

## II. Ways to Manage Mural Design, Installation and Maintenance

Many communities have created a Mural Steering Committee that manages a mural content, application, and approval process with the goal being to encourage murals that compliment community character.

Creating a steering committee also provides an opportunity to include a cross section of members representing different aspects of the community such as property owners, community government representatives, historical society, architectural review board, Main Street organization members, and so on.

The tasks of a committee can vary and this list of possible tasks was gathered from a variety of communities. These tasks can include:

- A. Design process to encourage murals that compliment the community;
- B. Identification of potential mural location(s);
- C. Identification of potential mural artists;
- D. Creation of guidelines for mural content and themes that relate to the community;
- E. Creation of mural application and submission process (this is important even when the mural has to go through planning review or architectural review if there is a local architectural review board);
- G. Creation of a permitting application and review process;
- H. Creation of an agreement between artist and property owner on who is responsible for maintenance and/or removal of the mural.

*Mural in Wytheville, Va about Edith Bowling Wilson.*

Some communities include the following requirements for property owners:

1. Installation and agreement forms must be executed by the property owner before a mural is installed;
2. Owner is responsible for the maintenance of the property;
3. Owner must have insurance coverage.

Some communities have agreements with the artists that provide expectations of the artists as well as their ownership of a copyright and responsibility for maintenance if needed.

Some communities create Criteria for Approval that may emphasize enhancing the aesthetics of a community, telling the story of a community, appropriate imagery for the community, appropriate visual scale depending on the viewpoints of the mural whether vehicular or pedestrian, installation techniques, etc.

The Virginia Main Street website has several helpful blog posts about murals:

- <https://virginiainmainstreet.com/2021/10/15/finding-home-grown-muralists/>
- <https://virginiainmainstreet.com/2021/06/14/art-students-paint-new-mural-in-old-town-warrenton/>
- <https://virginiainmainstreet.com/2022/03/21/even-parking-garages-can-be-beautiful/>
- <https://virginiainmainstreet.com/2022/10/26/creating-our-culture-new-mural-raises-awareness-for-lynchburg-artists-of-color/>



### III. Sample Mural Guidelines

The following sample guidelines and standards for murals are a compilation from several different communities listed in the Community Examples section.

- Site should have exposure to the public at all times.
- Murals should be in scale with the district and surrounding buildings.
- Murals should not be painted on previously unpainted masonry walls.
- Murals should not be installed in lieu of needed masonry cleaning or repointing.
- The condition of the wall should be carefully evaluated in terms of being stable, no unresolved water water/moisture condition, etc.
- Consider cleaning the wall before painting to ensure all peeling or other wall surface material has been addressed. Power washing is not recommended.
- Mount murals on side or rear elevations and not on a primary façade or above the roof line or over any architectural elements
- Use appropriate paint for exterior surfaces, no neon or fluorescent paints.
- Avoid south facing elevations as murals will fade more quickly.
- Do not cover doors and windows.
- Murals are not recommended on elevations with significant architectural details and materials.
- Do not paint over historically significant artwork or architectural details.
- Avoid visual clutter.
- Murals are not considered signs and should not have sign content. Logos or company advertising should not be permitted.
- Limit the percentage of a wall that can be covered with a mural.
- Limit lighting or require approvals.
- Mural removal should include any mounting hardware, caulk, adhesives, etc. and a return to the original condition.



*These murals in Danville (above) and Gloucester (below) are good examples of content relating to the community. Danville has a rich railroad history while Gloucester is known for its annual Daffodil Festival.*



## IV. Community Examples

What follows are examples of how some communities undertake design review and implementation of murals. Much of the mural guidance in this tech sheet is also from guidelines and procedures in these communities.

Frederick Maryland:

In Frederick, Maryland, the Historic Preservation Commission oversees the design review for murals and public art in the historic districts. Key factors that they consider include:

- The project's relationship to character-defining facades or features (such as doors and windows);
- The project's placement within a historic streetscape or landscape;
- The project's physical impact on historic materials;
- The projects height, scale and massing as it relates to the historic setting.



*Mural of Hope, Asbury Church, Frederick, MD*

Frankfort, Kentucky

Frankfort, Kentucky has a very detailed Mural Installation Guide that addresses most of the considerations for adding murals to a historic downtown. See <https://www.frankfort.ky.gov/579/Public-Art>



*This mural in Frankfort (above) was applied to a side elevation that was already painted and had no architectural detail (below). The mural is by Anna Murphy <https://annapmurphy.com>.*



## Greensburg, Indiana

The Building Commissioner consults with the Murals and Arts Committee and “strives to strike an appropriate balance between historic character and artistic expression.”

## Atlanta, Georgia

The Historic Preservation Considerations for Murals led by the Fox Theatre Institute considers the following: “Painting and installation materials that are used should always be reversible, and the building surface should not be harshly cleaned, stripped or compromise the masonry of the building. If possible, the mural could be installed on a surface of a temporary film and applied. This means the film could be easily removed and research into this process could be supported by the Historic Preservation Commission and the applicant together. ”

## Milwaukee, Wisconsin Draft Mural Guidelines

Draft Mural Guidelines for Historic Properties were adopted by the Historic Preservation Commission in 2020 and include design standards. Many of the standards are similar to those listed above. See <https://city.milwaukee.gov/cityclerk/hpc>.

## Keith County, Nebraska

Keith County has a very active Community Vision Planning initiative through Keith County Area Development <https://www.kcad.org/mural>. One of their initiatives is “ First Impressions - Curb Appeal”. Part of that initiative was a Mural Project completed in 2022. To implement the project, the organization created guidelines both for the property owner and the artist along with an application process including design, budget, etc. See <https://www.kcad.org/mural.html>. They promoted the project via social media and other means and received seven mural proposals from artists in Montana, Colorado, and Nebraska. Funding for the mural was provided by a local foundation.



*The 2022 Mural Project was created by Kara Bernbeck Designs and painted by both Kara Bernbeck and Arbor Street Studios. KCAD was able to implement the project thanks to the Keith County Foundation Fund and donations from the 2022 Keith County Big Give.*