

THURSDAY, OCTOBER. 22, 2015



## CITY APPROVES FIRST PIECE IN ROUNDABOUT ART SERIES

Next spring, the city will install a new piece of public art in the center of the roundabout at Main Street and Orange Avenue: a 20-foot-tall, 2,500-pound, infinity-symbol-shaped sculpture.

by: David Conway News Editor

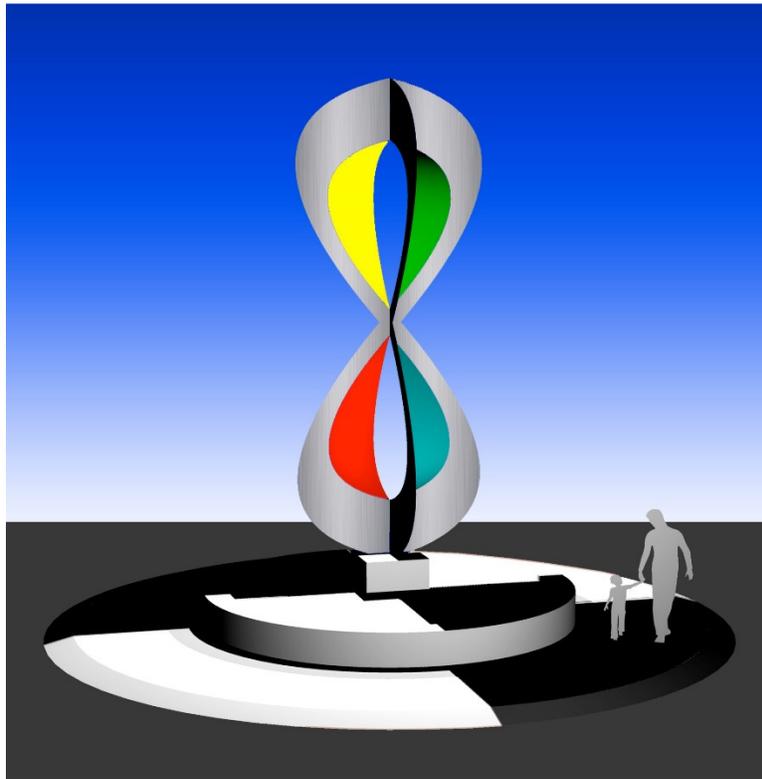
Taken separately, the idea of installing a new roundabout or a new piece of public art in Sarasota might not sit well with many residents.

And yet, taken together, there was no controversy when the City Commission considered the first piece in a series of sculptures to be placed in the center of the city's roundabouts.

On Monday, the City Commission voted unanimously to approve the installation of "Embracing Our Differences" in the middle of the recently opened Main Street and Orange Avenue roundabout. The sculpture will be commissioned and donated by the developers of One Palm, meeting that project's public art requirement.

"Embracing Our Differences" is the product of a national call to artists, organized by the Sarasota nonprofit organization Embracing Our Differences that combines art and

education. After sifting through 39 submissions, a panel of judges selected a piece by S. Blessing Hancock, an artist from Tucson, Ariz.



This sketch shows the placement of "Embracing our Differences" at the center of the Main Street and Orange Avenue roundabout.

Once completed, the infinity symbol-shaped sculpture will stand 20 feet tall and weigh an estimated 2,500 pounds, according to Embracing Our Differences Executive Director Michael Shelton. Red, yellow, blue and green resin insert panels will sit within the stainless steel frame.

“The infinity symbol, from the artist’s standpoint and our standpoint, represents the future of Sarasota and the wealth of diversity and inclusion we have to draw upon here,” Shelton said.

Although Shelton said it would have been nice to commission a Sarasota artist to produce the sculpture, he said the judges were not wowed by the few local submissions entered. Overall, the group was focused on selecting the best overall sculpture.

“We didn’t give — nor did we have any intention of giving — a preference to a local artist at the risk of not getting the best possible work piece,” Shelton said.

Commissioner Shelli Freeland Eddie asked about the sculpture’s height, which Shelton said concerned him initially. As a point of reference, Unconditional Surrender is 25 feet

tall, city Integration General Manager David Smith said. Shelton and city staff went to the roundabout and placed a 20-foot-high pole in the center, an experiment that eased Shelton's worries.

"We were all unanimous, I believe, that the 20-foot height was an appropriate scale for that intersection," Shelton said.

Susan McLeod, chairwoman of the Sarasota Sculpture Center and a member of the jury that picked Hancock's artwork, was happy with the process that led to the selection of "Embracing our Differences." As the city continues to build roundabouts, its Public Art Committee is working on procuring artwork to place in other roundabout centers along U.S. 41 and downtown.

Considering the importance the community places on the arts, McCleod said this first endeavor would serve as a good example for subsequent searches for roundabout sculptures.

"We've done a lot of public art presentations with monumental sculpture in this city and have an international acclaimed reputation for it," McCleod said. "With that, we have a very strong interest in these sculptures as they're juried and sculpted."