

# CHESTERTOWN PERMIT

Organization/Name      Wanda Boyer, Maria Wood, and Arlene  
Contact Person            Lee

Telephone                410 299 4539

You are hereby given permission to: Paint two street murals, one on lower High Street that says Black Lives Matter and one on North College Avenue that says We Can't Breathe.

Requests of Town Personnel: Close the sections of High Street and College Avenue on two consecutive days from 3pm - 9pm.

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This permit is to comply with all Town Ordinances, and is to be completed within \_\_\_ days from the date listed below. The Mayor and Council will not be responsible for any accident resulting from this permit.

By Order of Mayor and Council

Date of Event \_\_\_ TBD \_\_\_\_\_

Submitted by  \_\_\_\_\_  
Print name    \_\_\_ Arlene Lee \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_ 7/21/20 \_\_\_\_\_

Authorized by \_\_\_\_\_  
                         W. S. Ingersoll, Town Manager

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Proposal for Street Murals

Maria Wood, Wanda Boyer and Arlene Lee propose to organize and fund two street murals in Chestertown as a work of public art created through a community-wide event to meet the urgency and immediacy of the moment, as our community's visible commitment to a better future for all.

### The Murals:

1. **“Black Lives Matter”**
  - a. **Option A:** Located on High Street, starting at the corner of Water Street and extending to the corner of Queen Street, between the parking spaces on either side of High Street. (see diagram A, attached)
  - b. **Option B:** Located on High Street, starting at the corner of Queen Street and extending approximately halfway between Court Street and Cross Street (adjacent to Memorial Park), between the parking spaces on either side of High Street. (see diagram B, attached)
  - c. **Option C:** Located on High Street starting at the waterfront and ending just past Water Street. (see diagram C, attached)
2. **“We Can’t Breathe”:** Located on College Avenue, starting at the corner of Calvert Street and extending to High Street. (see diagram D, attached)

### The Time Frame:

The murals would be painted over the course of two days and would be maintained for one year, at which time the group would either repaint or the town would resurface according to their normal street maintenance plan.

### Funding:

The project will be funded through private donations and local foundations. Contributions are being accepted via Sumner Hall and a number of donations and donation commitments have already been made by individuals, as well as the Hedgelawn Foundation. Of course, we hope that the Mayor and Council would also contribute to this meaningful project, either funding or supplies.

Funds will be used for:

- Honoraria for the artist and designer
- Paint
- Rollers, trays, rags, cleaning supplies
- Incidentals: Bottles of water, small snack items

### The Process:

Two local artists, Gordon Wallace and Kevin Harris, will lay out the murals according to the diagrams presented with this permit request.

The murals will be painted directly on the streets, using a federal specification approved latex traffic paint that is water based, extremely durable, safe, and fast drying. The colors selected for the murals are red, black and green, with one design element on College Avenue.

The sections of High Street and College Avenue would be closed to traffic during the painting process, from 3pm to 9pm on two consecutive days.

Each letter will be painted by different local organizations and groups to make this a community-wide activity, under the supervision of the artists designing the murals. If the permit is approved, teams will be recruited from local churches, youth groups and communities. A number of individuals and groups have already volunteered to participate in painting, including the following:

- Residents of Calvert Heights
- Students Talking About Race
- A team of High Street residents
- Councilman Ellsworth Tolliver
- Cheryl Hoopes
- Patricia Deitz
- Ramala Deitz
- Jan Elvin
- Paul Cambardella

### **The Purpose:**

These murals would be a tangible declaration that as a community, we recognize both our past and our present. They would document our commitment to take bold and concrete steps to make our future inclusive and welcoming. The murals would be an important statement saying "We see you, we hear you, we welcome you, we value you, we acknowledge the past and we will work together for a fair and just future for all of us."

Gordon Wallace said it best, as quoted recently in the Kent Pilot editorial supporting the murals: Wallace draws his inspiration from the late writer James Baldwin who said, "Not everything faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." Wallace explained. "It allows people to be put in a conscious place about injustice on their own terms. This reminder can help us all be more aware of the injustice happening, which will hopefully make us all willing to work towards a change."

Kevin Harris, a local artist and a resident of Washington Park, adds that "this would be a great opportunity for Chestertown to acknowledge its past and look into the future".

### **Businesses, Organizations and Individuals Supporting this Project:**

- The Social Action Committee for Racial Justice
- Chestertown RiverArts
- Kent County NAACP
- Kent Cultural Alliance
- C.V. Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience
- The Black Men's Community Council

- Sumner Hall
- Massoni Art Gallery
- Stam's Luncheonette
- The Imperial Hotel
- The Kitchen at the Imperial Hotel
- The Kent Pilot
- Evergrain Bread Company
- Germaine's Carry Out
- Samaritan Group of Kent County
- Students Talking About Race
- Heather Mizeur and Soul Force Politics
- Vic and Patricia Pfeiffer
- Robin Wood
- Anne Highfield-Clark
- Nick Garcia
- Philip Dutton
- Debbie and Rob Glebe
- Carol Mylander
- Patricia Dietz
- Nancy Bennington
- Molly Rhodes

**The Reasoning:**

The murals are not political in nature. "Black Lives Matter" is a simple declaration of fact. It needs to be made explicitly because our country and our town has not shown, in the past and in many instances in the present, that it is true. Although various organizations and affiliations have sprung up around this phrase, and these groups are viewed with many different opinions and perceptions, the words have a very straightforward origin and meaning. Underscoring our point, the U.S. Office of Special Counsel on July 17 announced their decision Black Lives Matter is not political or partisan, and that federal employees may express their support for this statement.

The phrase arose spontaneously on social media, in response to the death of Trayvon Martin. At that moment, and still today, it is at its core an affirmation of a truth so obvious it should not need saying. However, too often our society fails to uphold this truth. It is an affirmation that needs to be acknowledged but also a plea that needs to be answered.

Placing the words Black Lives Matter on the street is important. The street has often been a site of trauma and terror for Black people in America. George Floyd's neck was ground into a street. Michael Brown's body was left to lie in the street after he was killed. High Street itself is where enslaved people were forced to walk, shackled and chained, when Chestertown was one of the busiest slave-trading ports in North America, and where myriad other brutalities and travesties of justice have been perpetrated in our town's history. High Street, specifically, is also a place where Black people in Chestertown often do not feel welcome. Meanwhile, white people control the downtown streets, closing them at will for festivals, parades, the annual re-enactment of the tea party and, now, outdoor dining.

The streets of this country are also the time-honored site of public discourse and protest, from the speeches and calls to action of the founders in the 1770s to Marches on Washington to the ongoing protests sparked by Mr. Floyd's murder. The streets are very often the place where positive changes begin, where as a society we take steps toward a nation that truly does offer freedom and justice to all. In the words of John Lewis, whose passing the nation has mourned this week, "Get in and stay in the streets of every city, every village and hamlet of this nation until true freedom comes, until the revolution of 1776 is complete."

The act of painting the surface of High Street, even with artwork that is only meant to last for a year, is literally grounded in history, both painful and celebratory. The street is an infinitely more evocative location for a meaningful expression of the words "Black Lives Matter" than alternatives such as banners that would flutter and float in the breeze, unconnected to the significance of the words they bear, and that would be smaller, less noticeable, and have less impact.

We, along with a great many of our fellow community members, both white and Black, strongly believe that street murals are the most meaningful, most appropriate, and most community-spirited symbol Chestertown could choose to embrace and affirm the words "Black Lives Matter."

The other proposed mural, the words "We Can't Breathe" painted on College Avenue, is not an afterthought. This mural will exist in the heart of a historically Black neighborhood. It, too, is a statement of fact and not a political statement or a reference to a specific incident or agency. The College Avenue mural was conceived and designed by members of Chestertown's Black community to communicate the constant feeling of being suffocated in the place where everyone should feel most comfortable- our hometown. Members of the Black community, many with roots here going back to the town's earliest days, have expressed again and again, in many different ways, the feeling of being unvalued, unwelcome, and unsafe downtown. They have heard hollow words year after year. Many do not have faith that Chestertown believes they matter.

The conversations and debates that have occurred about this proposal have convinced us more strongly than ever of the importance of these murals. They are important as a way to open a door to the conversations—even uncomfortable ones—that this town needs in order to begin to imagine the systemic changes that will enable Black business owners to thrive on High Street and Black Chestertonians to breathe easily on their town's historic streets. We believe the murals will be a visible commitment to the policy changes that must follow to make the words have meaning.

We are encouraged by the passionate outpouring of public support for the murals. Residents, organizations, and businesses have written eloquent endorsements of the project, offered financial contributions, and eagerly volunteered to help with painting. The enthusiasm and hope sparked by this proposal supports our belief that if we allow it, this project can bring the community together in strength and celebration. We are optimistic that our local leaders will hear the voices of their constituents and support the murals project.

## APPENDIX A- Design and Maps

### High Street Mural:

1. Google Distance: 384ft
2. In-person: 365ft x 26 ft

# BLACK LIVES MATTER

### Black Lives Matter Street Mural Option A



### Black Lives Matter Street Mural Option B



### Black Lives Matter Street Mural Option C



North College Avenue Street Mural:

1. Google Distance: 300ft
2. In-person: 240ft x 25ft

# WE CAN'T BREATHE

We Can't Breathe Street Mural



## Appendix B- **The Debate**

We would like to add a word on the notion of these street murals as a litmus test for anti-racist beliefs. That is not a view we hold or have put forward. Reasonable people can have differing views on the murals project for any number of reasons. The arguments against the murals, however, do not withstand scrutiny.

Historic Charm: There are those that argue that these temporary street murals are somehow in conflict with the historic charm of downtown Chestertown. The murals do acknowledge less charming aspects of Chestertown's history that some would rather not face. To avoid that history certainly sends the message that Black lives do not matter. It also ignores that fact that history is something that we both live with and create through our actions today. Consider what "Historic Chestertown" will mean to future generations when they look back at us as we now look back at the Chestertown of our past. When the history of this momentous year is written, will Chestertown in 2020 look upright and principled or defensive and regressive, more attached to the sanitized illusion of a complex past than to the heartfelt need of present-day people to be recognized—to hear, feel, and see their hometown bear visible witness to the simple truth that their lives matter.

Property Values: The claim that temporary street murals will drive down property values is speculative at best. At worst it is disingenuous. Black Lives Matter as a statement is accepted and supported today by large and growing majorities of Americans across racial and ethnic groups, according to the Pew Research Center. From NASCAR to the NFL to Nike and the College Board, mainstream businesses have proclaimed that Black Lives Matter. While we certainly hope every one of those businesses sincerely holds and acts on that belief, we know that if it were not good for business, they would not say it. Right here on the Eastern Shore, in Cambridge Maryland—a town with a very difficult racial history—the Black Lives Mural on the street has attracted visitors and possibly even increased tourism and customers in local businesses. A Black Lives Matter mural in Chestertown may well help, not hurt, the local economy.

Slippery Slope: We also reject the argument that a Black Lives Matter mural will open the door to offensive or partisan street murals or displays. Certainly, the qualitative difference between the statement that Black Lives Matter and hateful symbols such as swastikas speaks for itself, but beyond that there is no requirement that the town approve one mural simply because it has approved another. Threats of litigation are deeply rooted in efforts to fight the empowerment of oppressed peoples. True leadership accepts those threats as the price of standing for something, for inspiring and motivating us to envision a better future. True leadership is essential to leading us forward, unbowed and unintimidated by the inevitable threats.

Permanent Art Display: This is also not an either-or-proposition between street murals and a permanent monument or art display. We support more permanent, thoughtful public art projects that commemorate Black history in Chestertown and recognize the Black community that is here today. These projects will require, and deserve, a lengthier process of discussion, planning, and implementation. Our proposal meets the immediacy of the present moment. We encourage the new Public Arts Commission to make a permanent anti-racism display its first priority.

## Appendix C- Local Media

### **From Karen Somerville, commenting on the Kent Pilot's editorial supporting the street mural:**

#### **“should not deface the Charm of the Historic District of High Street”**

I have cause to draw deep breathes that ache to the very depths of my soul when I read this. Please tell me where is the charm in the history of High Street and its adjoining streets in the lynching of James Taylor or the tar and feathering lead by the town's Sheriff of a Black woman and the White male who assisted in her protest; the sentences handed down from Kent County's Court house to White women who bore the “issue” of Black men; was the charm in the White women who watched from the widows walks that sit atop the gracious houses still lining High Street pining for the return of husbands-Captains who docked their ships at the foot of High Street and brought their chained merchandise to auctions selling Black Lives?

Is it in today's overzealous sentences leveled upon Blacks and others lacking social-economic equivalence? I'm starved to see charm in the obligatory gathering of young Black men reduced to stand in one location on High Street during the Tea Party, incessantly guarded by police because a desire to be a part of something has brought them there, but the agenda repeatedly fails to make an admirable place for them yet holds hope to benefit from the dollars they spend. No charm in the loss of benefits from the skills and talents of numerous Black Artists and would be patrons whose past pains are so prevailing it doesn't allow them to cross the threshold of the Garfield Theatre for what was the “charm” of the former movie theatre; the rudeness endured by Blacks who have dared to grace downtown businesses (NOT ALL but even one is too many) only to be greeted by silence, suspicious trailing, and rudeness?

Charm, when the country puts a Black man in the White House and that news does NOT make the front page of the local newspaper- situated within the “charm” of High Street, yet it too benefits from Black dollars spent? Was charming the goal as gentrification herded Black families from downtown C-town dwellings that held generations of heritage and familiar comforts?

Where is the “charm”? If charm is to be defined only by the eye, what then guides the character of our hearts? To be led by the concern of maintaining charm over equality is like dead fish in Christmas wrappings. It will always be pretty on the outside, but the long, slow rot on the inside is surely stinking up the place. If all this talk about racism is making you uncomfortable, that means you are listening. Now that we finally have your ear Chestertown, are you brave and honorable enough to stay on the path to equality so that every living soul can experience the “Charm”?”

# Why Public Art? By John Schratwieser

July 11, 2020

Sometime in 2005, during my first year as the Director of the then Prince Theater Foundation (Now Garfield Center for the Arts), I'd invited a friend to volunteer to help me with preparing the theater for an evening event. Her job was to place a program for the event on every seat. When she finished the main level, she handed the rest to me and said, "I'm not going up there."

For two-thirds of its 90 years, the New Lyceum / Prince Theater was segregated. There was a "Blacks Only" entrance, ticket box, staircase, and what's more is that even the balcony was separated by a wall – Whites up front in chairs, Blacks behind, on benches. When we were doing research for the student-created "A Chestertown Attic" in Playmakers summer camp 2006, a life-long White resident of Kent County with 300+ years of lineage here shared this with us about sitting in the balcony in the 1950's – "We knew better... we climbed over that stupid wall and we sat with our friends." There is a history here, we must acknowledge it. We can do that with Public Art.

Public Art should exist to speak, unconstrained about problems, celebrations, injustices, memories, and so much more. It should exist to erase barriers to art, it should exist "among" the people. It must exist to stir emotion, to honor good work, and to challenge our understanding of, and sometimes the insufficiency of what we were taught. Sometimes its sole purpose is to make us see uncomfortable truths. Public art should not infringe on someone else's right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; it should especially assert those rights for people who have historically and societally been hindered from achieving them.

The phrase "Black Lives Matter" is a statement of truth. It is not political. It does not challenge my life and its purpose. It does not take away from my humanity but it does assert the humanity of those whom this country once called three-fifths of a human being.

If painting the words "Black Lives Matter" on the streets of Historic Chestertown makes one Black person feel safe and valued in their own hometown, then it is worth it. If painting the words "Black Lives Matter" on the streets of this 18th Century Port town, known for its slave trade" creates a conversation that leads to the opening of one Black-owned business, then it is worth it. If painting the words "Black Lives Matter" on the streets of the home of Henry Highland Garnet, Isaac Mason, Albert Walker, Clarence Hawkins, and so many more, can affect policies and practices and values statements of local governments, nonprofits, churches and businesses, then it is worth it.

In my 30 years as an arts and nonprofit administrator and advocate, I have learned a great deal. But I know this: I don't have all the answer, none of us do. So, in my role as the director of the Kent Cultural Alliance, I will take up the mantle of my predecessor and mentor Leslie Prince Raimond, and I will show up, and listen, and I will actively support the use of the arts to engage our County in important conversations moving forward. This mural can start a new chapter.

# Chestertown Council Needs Better Understanding of BLM Message and Local History

July 9, 2020

Since the Black Lives Matters protests and marches began in Chestertown and across the country, following the murder of George Floyd May 25, the Kent Pilot has chronicled the town's reckoning with its history of racial injustice and the efforts of late underway to reform our police department and other local institutions.

If anything, the 100 Days of Action advanced by the Social Action Committee for Racial Justice has proven a tremendous opportunity for residents to unify on a path towards reconciliation.

One attempt to advance reconciliation is the proposal for two street murals. One is a "Black Lives Matter" mural that would run up High Street from the old Customs House to Cross Street. The other, "I Can't Breathe," would run College Avenue between High to Calvert streets. These murals would give Chestertown a unified voice in the fight against racism.

While there was no discussion about the College Avenue mural, the High Street proposal raised concerns from some council members. In particular, Mayor Chris Cerino objected to the street mural in the Historic District on High Street because it would look "out of place" in downtown's 18th Century setting.

He also identified Black Lives Matter as a "slogan," which the Kent Pilot believes marginalizes a movement that has gained and maintained momentum in the weeks since George Floyd's murder at the hands of four white Minneapolis policemen.

The mural's path on High Street, starting at the Customs House, is most fitting. Students of local history know that Chestertown was one of the most active slave-trading ports in Maryland and that the Customs House once stood as a large clearinghouse for human trafficking and exploitation. Slave labor built most, if not all, of the homes and infrastructure in downtown prior to emancipation.

And the storefronts serve as a reminder of the town's Jim Crow legacy, which perpetuated institutional white privilege and roadblocks to education and political participation that stole ideas and opportunities from black citizens. There are many still living among us who went to the segregated theatre, now the Garfield, and were forced to pick up their prescriptions and lunch orders from an alleyway doorway.

Mayor Cerino said the mural would be "pretty in your face." The Kent Pilot believes this is the whole point, and that facing our past, however uncomfortable, is the only true path towards reconciliation, which stands at the heart of the mural project.

Gordon Wallace, Jr., a Kent County native who grew up on Cannon Street, is the young graphic designer who has taken on the project. A recent graduate of Stevenson University in graphic art and marketing, Wallace is one of Kent's younger generations returning to make his home here.

Wallace draws his inspiration from the late writer James Baldwin who said, "Not everything faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

“This mural is thought-provoking, but not overwhelming,” Wallace explained. “It allows people to be put in a conscious place about injustice on their own terms. This reminder can help us all be more aware of the injustice happening, which will hopefully make us all willing to work towards a change.”

The July 6th council meeting demonstrates why it is time for town government to come back live. Zoom meetings continue to be an unnecessary crutch. If the council would invite the public back, it would find just how “out of place” some of the town’s leadership is on this issue.

The Mayor expressed concern about the cost of maintaining the mural over time, but we know that tax dollars go to maintain the Marina and other things the town cares about. When Cerino puts his mind to something it gets done.

And the murals will be made possible from private donations and citizens’ sweat and creativity.

We encourage the council to stop viewing Chestertown’s racist past through the lens of white privilege, which filters out the blight of slavery and racism. The history we embrace can’t be selective.

We applaud Councilmembers Ellsworth Tolliver and Meghan Efland’s support of the murals. Town Manager Bill Ingersoll also cut to the heart of the matter: this is an important message that needs to be made now.

In closing, the Imperial Hotel Building houses several businesses, including the Kent Pilot. Collectively we welcome the “Black Lives Matter” mural on High Street and the message it sends. We can’t think of a better place for it.

Black Lives Matter!

The Kent Pilot