

# From gallery to the alley: Boynton Beach plans to paint Dumpsters

## Boynton plans to paint murals on Dumpsters

By Erika Pesantes  
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Boynton Beach

They're large, bulky, smelly and tough to ignore. And now the city could draw even more attention to them. Officials are proposing transforming the steel-green Dumpsters into pieces of art by splashing color and creating murals on them. The idea springs from an unlikely partnership — Boynton Beach's arts commission and the public works department.

On Tuesday, the arts commission will discuss the possibility of launching a public art program that converts 20 city-owned Dumpsters into artwork by engaging local artists and youths. The project would ultimately need commissioners' blessing.

Barbara Ready, the arts commission chairwoman, brushes off what others might think about the zany idea: "Those crazy folks out in Boynton Beach," she said. "Nobody's done it. Who cares? It's public art." Of the 1,600 Dumpsters the city leases to businesses and residential complexes, about 100 of them remain in plain view. These were exempt from an ordinance requiring Dumpsters to be kept behind a masonry enclosure, public works director Jeff Livergood said. "A Dumpster is not attractive no matter how hard we try," he said. "If you can't hide it, do what you can to make it better." And the idea is "innovative," said Liesel Fenner, manager of public art for the Washington D.C.-based nonprofit Americans for the Arts. No other city Fenner knows of has tried a similar temporary and functional art project.

The nonprofit has a national network of more than 350 government-sanctioned public art programs, with Florida leading the number of new public arts programs being created, Fenner said. Public art became mainstream as artists pushed their creations out of the galleries and into the streets in protest of commercialization of art in the 1970s, she said. Governments have sponsored a wide range of public art projects, including courthouses integrated with artistic elements and decorated bus stops. "Even the 'micro' of doing Dumpsters is fabulous," Fenner said. "Dumpsters are so ugly, why wouldn't we want to see something more beautiful?"

Vice Mayor Jose Rodriguez calls himself an "advocate" for beautifying the city, and decorating Dumpsters is one way to do it. The possibilities for turning Dumpsters into art are endless, he says. "It could be so many things. It's a no-brainer." "It's going to add character to this city," Rodriguez said, and give Boynton Beach "an opportunity to shine. I think it's going to be catchy."

The city leases Dumpsters out to businesses and replaces them every three to five years. New Dumpsters cost the city between \$400 to \$600, but none will be purchased specifically for this program. The city's public arts fund would pay for the Dumpster art. Livergood warns the art would not remain "pristine" as dumping loads of garbage could chip paint off. "We have to be willing to accept that and appreciate the benefits we'll have in the interim," he said.

John Snowden, the owner of the 40-year-old Jo-Al's Restaurant, has had a Dumpster with a mural of four fish on it adorning his parking lot since 2001. He commissioned artist Judy Dempsey to spruce it up. At least twice a week, people who dine in his restaurant or passers-by ask about the nautical image, which he hoses down with water to preserve. "I crack up when people ask me about it," Snowden said. He hopes others are inspired to decorate their Dumpsters. "It should be mandatory."

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