

**Case Study Title:**

***Suwanee SculpTour: Not Your Grandmother's Bronze Eagle***

**Case Study Category:** Economic Vitality (could also be considered under Community Building)

**Jurisdiction Name:** City of Suwanee, GA

**City Manager Name:** Marty Allen

**Application to be considered for Innovation Award:** Yes

**Application to be considered for the Rapid Fire Session:** I don't know what that is, but I'm pretty sure we'd like it 😊

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Public Arts Commission Member (Name/Person to be determined upon acceptance)  
Suwanee citizen or business owner involved in City's public art initiative

## Synopsis

### ***The Beginning***

In a 2010 National Citizen Survey, administered through ICMA, 98 percent of Suwanee residents said that their community is an “excellent” or “good” place to live. Additionally, Suwanee was twice named by *Money Magazine* as one of the “best places to live” and recently ranked #3 by *Kiplinger.com* as a top place to raise kids. Still, City officials in this town of about 15,500 residents aren’t satisfied. They know that Suwanee can be an even better, bolder, and more vibrant community, and they believe that a key factor in taking Suwanee to that next level is a commitment to the arts. Over the past three years, Suwanee has embraced public art as its unique niche by which it can further develop its community identity, enhance citizens’ quality of life, and creatively promote economic development.

In 2008, Suwanee City Council created the seven-member Public Arts Commission (PAC). Initially, the PAC created a new City policy by which private developers of new projects must meet with the PAC as part of the pre-development process and are strongly encouraged to set aside 1 percent of construction costs for public art purposes, either on the development site or elsewhere in the City. Development has significantly slowed since the policy was adopted in 2008, but has recently picked-up and the “encouragement” is going very well as every development (about 5 in the last year) is participating in some way. Additionally, committed to leading by example, the City of Suwanee allocates 1 percent of construction costs used for City facilities to public art.

### ***Suwanee SculpTour***

In 2011, the PAC achieved another success with the installation of the inaugural Suwanee SculpTour, an “art on loan” walkable exhibit of original outdoor sculptures that are on display nearly year-round in downtown Suwanee. The 2012 exhibit, as did the 2011 exhibit, includes 15 sculptures created by local and national artists that are varied in style, material, size, and scale. On loan to the City from March to May, collectively, the sculptures create a dynamic art-focus to downtown. An RFP was drafted and released and our PAC selected the finalists with City Council approval. To our knowledge we are one of only two cities in Georgia with an art-on-loan program of this magnitude.

The funding for SculpTour comes mainly from corporate and private donations, sponsorships, grants, and hotel fund revenue. No tax payer dollars are used to support the hard costs of this program. Funding SculpTour requires approximately \$60,000.00 per exhibit. We have included a sample budget below which is a fair representation of our costs for the program however, keep in mind that these costs can be reduced (or increased) depending on variables such as, but not limited to, the number of sculptures on exhibit, how they are displayed, the amount of the artist stipend and prize money as well as the decision to purchase and retain a sculpture at the end of the exhibit.

### ***“Sample Budget”***

Below are general costs to implement the program as described above:

▪ Artists’ Stipend	\$15,000.00
▪ Allocation for art purchase (People’s Choice)	\$17,000.00
▪ Cost of Bases (Year 1-Subsequent years less)	\$9,000.00
▪ Artists’ Awards	\$5,000.00
▪ Marketing (Funded by Hotel Fund dollars)	<u>\$14,000.00</u>
	\$60,000.00

### ***Economic Development and Citizen Involvement***

Suwanee SculpTour serves as a unique public art encounter and an economic development tool that attracts visitors, residents, and businesses to the area. The path of SculpTour encompasses different areas in our downtown and connects a new Town Center area to our historic Main Street. The exhibit encourages people to get out of their cars and walk, using the pedestrian underpass, to explore both distinct areas of downtown Suwanee. We believe that Suwanee SculpTour is not only a fantastic image-builder for our downtown area, but also a creative economic development initiative that has positive effects in drawing visitors, corporate partners, and citizens to the community.

A printed brochure, as well as an on-line version and mobile application, helps guide visitors along an approximately 1.3-mile route that features each of the 15 sculptures on loan as well as several permanent public art pieces. The brochure explains the City’s commitment to public art and showcases each sculpture and the artists’ motivation for each piece.

One of the most exciting elements of the program is the technology-enhanced viewer interaction. Citizens and visitors may vote for their favorite sculpture; the winning piece becomes the “people’s choice” and will be purchased by the PAC and added to the City’s permanent collection. Votes may be cast through the end of the exhibit in March via paper ballot, the City’s website, mobile application, or QR codes printed on signs on each sculpture. Over 5,000 votes were cast electronically for the 2011 “people’s choice.” Another interactive technological element is the creation of a podcast, downloadable to a smart phone or other device via *iTunes*. The audio tour includes clever narration and interviews with the artists giving their personal impression of each sculpture.

### ***Gaining momentum***

The City utilized the launch of SculpTour as an opportunity to overcome the obstacle of apathy and educate the community on the value of, and generating enthusiasm for, public art. The 2011 Suwanee SculpTour sculptures and artists were unveiled at a luncheon for nearly 100 Suwanee businesspeople, educators, and art enthusiasts. Keynote speaker Joe Bankoff, at the time president and CEO of the Woodruff Arts Center, evangelized on the benefits – and necessity – of public art in his presentation, “Art and the Bottom Line.”

Bankoff told his Suwanee audience that art is not just about culture or playing a key role in revitalization, “it is about the fact that we can use art as the glue, the magnet, the anchor that

brings a community together.” In today’s world, art equates to good jobs, a creative workforce, and an attractive environment. “It’s not just about building the arts,” he said. “It’s about building the community.”

This type of art-on-loan program is a creative way to bring a significant number of original sculptures to our citizens, exposing them to art that they may not otherwise have the opportunity to enjoy, on a budget that we can afford. In our second year of SculptTour, we found that artists from across the nation had heard of program and were excited to respond to our RFP. (In 2011, approximately 30 applications were received. We received over 60 in 2012 – more than double the first year’s submissions.)

### ***Transferability and Added Value***

Suwanee’s SculptTour program can easily be personalized and replicated in other communities. It’s a program that City Council, staff, Public Art Commission members, citizens and sponsors are clearly committed to and have an opportunity to participate in a meaningful way. Of course, financial support for public art is critical as well, and, particularly in these difficult economic times, use of tax revenues to support art can draw opposition. Private fundraising is a must in many cases.

In the same National Citizen Survey mentioned at the beginning of this submission, nearly three-quarters of surveyed residents felt that providing art in public spaces would add to the quality of life in Suwanee; 21 percent said public art would add “a lot of value” and 51 percent said “some value.” With successful public art initiatives, such as Suwanee SculptTour, we’d wager that even more residents will come to recognize the important role that public art plays in nourishing a cultured, vibrant community.

***Please visit [www.suwanee.com](http://www.suwanee.com) for more information about our community and for photos and online information about this year’s Suwanee SculptTour. Our official slogan is “Art: Suwanee Does it in Public.” Just another example of how Suwanee does things in bold fashion. 😊***

## **Presentation Style**

Our experienced presenters will present this case study using PowerPoint, clips of our podcast, our brochures/map as well as introducing lots of anecdotal stories – “the good, the bad, and the ugly” of having a public art initiative as part of your economic development philosophy. Our team can definitely promise you a creative and entertaining session. Depending on the length of the session, we may develop a group mock experience on “choosing artwork” for their imaginary community. This will allow participants to better understand one aspect of why embarking on a public art initiative can be very challenging, yet very satisfying for citizens and others.