



Planning Commission approves new murals policy

By **Jim Mayer, The Oregonian**
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Portland walls could sport more colorful murals under a new policy adopted by the planning commission Tuesday.

The policy would establish a permit system for murals and allow them on most areas of the city. It now goes to the City Council for approval.

The subject of murals in Portland has a checkered past. Before 1998, the city exempted murals from its sign regulations. But after a court ruled that the city was unconstitutionally discriminating against advertising, the city began regulating murals as signs. This limited them to 200 square feet, and the number of new murals dropped off significantly.

Then in 2005, the city expanded its public art program, which is exempt from the sign code, to include murals. Since then, more than 20 murals have been painted in Portland, but the process has limitations. Like other projects managed by the Regional Arts and Culture Council, public art murals must be placed on wall space that's already owned by the public, or on space dedicated through a public art easement.

That left out murals on private property. And the culture council's standards of artistic quality can rule out murals by community members.

To fix the problem, planners worked with the arts community and others to come up with the proposal that the planning commission approved.

To get a permit, a proposed mural must remain in place for five years and can not exceed 30 feet in height. The owner of the building cannot be paid to have the mural installed.

The mural must meet additional standards if it's located in a design overlay zone. And murals aren't allowed on landmarks or on "contributing" buildings in historic or conservation districts.

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