

# **Bloomberg Philanthropies Awards 26 U.S. Cities Grants To Transform Streets And Public Spaces Through The Asphalt Art Initiative**

*Asphalt Art Initiative provides funds and technical support for arts-driven street redesigns that improve safety, revitalize public spaces, and engage local communities*

*Inaugural Asphalt Art Initiative in 2020 transformed nearly 86,500 square feet of streets with artwork in 16 cities*

**New York, NY** – Bloomberg Philanthropies today announced that 26 U.S. cities will be awarded Asphalt Art Initiative grants, providing each up to \$25,000 to install projects in 2022-23 that use art and design to improve street safety, revitalize public spaces, and engage residents of their communities. This program is inspired by work done to improve pedestrian safety and revitalize New York City streets during Michael R. Bloomberg’s mayoralty (2002-2013) and the work of Bloomberg Philanthropies’ pro bono consulting arm Bloomberg Associates advising cities on implementing asphalt art projects. These new grants build on the success of Asphalt Art Initiative projects in 16 U.S. cities that were awarded support in 2020. “Asphalt art projects help cities reclaim public spaces, make them brighter and safer, and build community – all important goals, especially amid the continuing hardships of the pandemic,” **said Michael R. Bloomberg, founder of Bloomberg Philanthropies and 108th mayor of New York City.** “Cities that tap into the power of public art bring new life and energy to city streets, inspiring residents and fostering a shared spirit of neighborhood

pride. There can be real civic strength in public art, and this program helps cities capitalize on it.”

Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Asphalt Art Initiative responds to the growing number of cities around the world embracing art as an effective and relatively low-cost strategy to enliven and improve safety in their streets through interventions on plazas, sidewalks, crosswalks, intersections, and other transportation infrastructure. The grant program, which also includes providing cities technical assistance by urban design firm Street Plans Collaborative, is intended to create vibrant new public spaces, build local interagency collaborations, and increase each city’s capacity to work with artists as well as community groups on projects involving transportation infrastructure.

The selected Asphalt Art Initiative projects and cities include:

- **Pedestrian and cyclist safety enhancements in 10 cities:** Atlanta, GA; Baltimore, MD; Houston, TX; Kansas City, MO; Long Beach, CA; Memphis, TN; San Juan, PR; St Louis, MO; Tucson, AZ; and Wilmington, DE
- **Pedestrian plazas and public space improvements in 7 cities:** Birmingham, AL; Denver, CO; Detroit, MI; Fairbanks, AK; Newark, NJ; Providence, RI; and Syracuse, NY
- **Intersection and crosswalk murals in 9 cities:** Billings, MT; Chicago, IL; East Providence, RI; Huntington, WV; Kodiak, AK; New Brunswick, NJ; Niagara Falls, NY; Starkville, MS; Tallahassee, FL

Bloomberg Philanthropies is partnering with Rasmuson Foundation, based in Alaska, to support the Asphalt Art Initiative projects in Fairbanks and Kodiak, and the Joyce Foundation, based in Chicago, to support the project in Chicago.

“From Kodiak, Alaska to Atlanta, from San Juan to St. Louis, cities from every corner of the continent will show that safer, more inviting streets are just a brush stroke away,” said **Janette Sadik-Khan, Principal for Transportation at Bloomberg Associates and former commissioner of the New York City Department of Transportation.** “Started in the shadow of

the pandemic, the Asphalt Art Initiative has now grown into a movement. As communities recover, projects like these will inspire us to not just re-create the streets we had, but make them safer, more inviting and more vibrant than ever before.”

### **Asphalt Art Initiative Project Impacts:**

This next phase of the Bloomberg Philanthropies Asphalt Art Initiative comes as the cities in the first round of 16 grantees, announced in June 2020, will continue to roll out their projects through 2022. Twelve cities have implemented their projects this past year and collectively they have transformed a combined 86,476 square feet of streetscape with artwork and engaged nearly 5,000 residents and 171 artists in the design and installation process. With evaluations still underway, Asphalt Art projects have already demonstrated early clear benefits for neighborhoods:

- **Improving pedestrian safety:** In Kansas City, MO, the redesign of a problematic intersection reduced overall vehicle speeds by 45 percent, cut pedestrian crossing distances in half, and increased the percentage of pedestrians who feel safe crossing the intersection from 23 to 63 percent. Projects in Pittsburgh and Lancaster, PA, reshaped complicated five-way intersections, adding nine new crosswalks, and making them easier to navigate for pedestrians and bikers.
- **Revitalizing public space:** The City of Reno, NV, transformed 18,000 square feet of underutilized concrete into a vibrant event plaza. Now a home for festivals, food trucks, and green space, the plaza has become a hub for community events as well as a magnet bringing visitors downtown. By repurposing a parking lane, Chattanooga, TN, created a colorful gathering space near a new supermarket in a neighborhood that has historically been a food desert.
- **Engaging community:** Residents of Pittsburgh’s Friendship neighborhood participated in all aspects of the process from workshops to develop the design drawings to painting the mural under the direction of the lead artists. In Saginaw, MI, 29 artists and nearly 500 residents participated in a socially distanced all-day “Paint-A-Thon” resulting in three large intersection murals connected by a trail of community butterfly paintings. The City of Durham, NC, solicited local

voices through a multi-tiered survey process garnering 1,826 responses that informed each step of the design process to make a safer route to a local elementary school.

“Our first round of grantee cities has shown the unique value of creativity in addressing long-standing issues with the public realm,” said **Kate D. Levin, who leads the Arts Program at Bloomberg Philanthropies, is Principal for Cultural Assets Management at Bloomberg Associates and former commissioner of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.** “Artists can inspire collaborative, effective community action resulting in safer, more vibrant streets – and regenerating a sense of local identity as we work through the impacts of the pandemic.”

The first round of Asphalt Art Initiative grants followed the publication of the *Asphalt Art Guide*, which included case studies and best practices on developing Asphalt Art projects from cities around the world. The Guide has been accessed more than 6,000 times by government leaders, artists, and other practitioners in all 50 U.S. states and 83 countries. It was produced by the Bloomberg Associates Transportation and Cultural Assets Management teams in collaboration with Street Plans Collaborative and public art consultant Renee Piechocki. For more information on all the selected cities, and to download the free Asphalt Art Guide, visit [AsphaltArt.bloomberg.org](https://AsphaltArt.bloomberg.org).  
**Photos, podcasts, and videos for media use:**

To hear from artists, residents, city leaders and staff involved in Bloomberg Philanthropies Asphalt Art projects – and to access photos with credits and descriptions for media use, click [here](#).