

**CITY OF PORTLAND**  
**Background report on Thompson Fountain and Elk**  
Prepared by the City Arts Program, September 2021

The David P. Thompson Fountain and Elk was built in 1900 and donated to the City of Portland by David P. Thompson, who served as Portland's Mayor from 1879-1883 and was a founding director of the Oregon Humane Society. The bronze Elk sculpture was created by Roland Hinton Perry and the granite fountain and base were designed and built by H. G. Wright.

For 120 years, the structure was sited in the middle of SW Main Street, between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenues, featuring an octagonal granite reservoir with four water troughs, a central granite pedestal with water spouts, and a bronze elk sculpture atop the pedestal.



The Portland Water Bureau (PWB) is currently responsible for maintaining the water fountain and all of its components, including the pedestal and troughs, and connections to plumbing underneath the street. The PWB has an interagency agreement with Portland Parks & Recreation for PP&R to maintain all decorative water fountains in the City of Portland, including the Thompson Fountain.

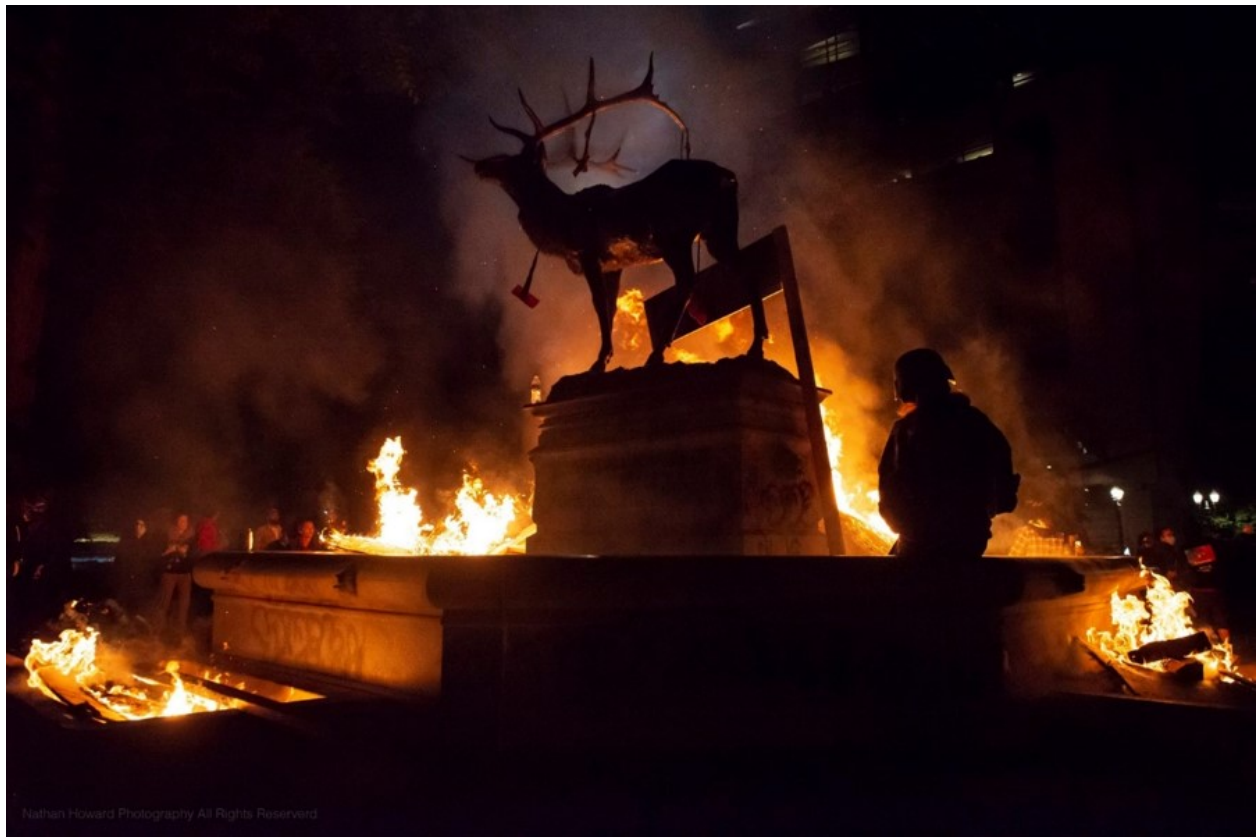
The Regional Arts & Culture Council (RACC) has been responsible for the care and maintenance of the bronze Elk sculpture for over 40 years.



## History of Protest

Throughout much of its existence, the Elk Fountain has been a gathering place, a place for activism and an oddity of endearment. Prior to 2020, the most recent protest-related damage was during the Occupy Movement of 2011, when the Elk's antlers were damaged.

In the summer of 2020, several fires were lit in the fountain's troughs. The granite fountain was severely damaged, and the bronze elk statue was slightly damaged.



RACC removed the bronze sculpture for safe keeping and repair on July 2, 2020, and the remaining undamaged stone fountain pieces were disassembled and removed for safe keeping on July 17, 2020. The salvaged stone pieces were cleaned to remove graffiti and the condition of each was cataloged.

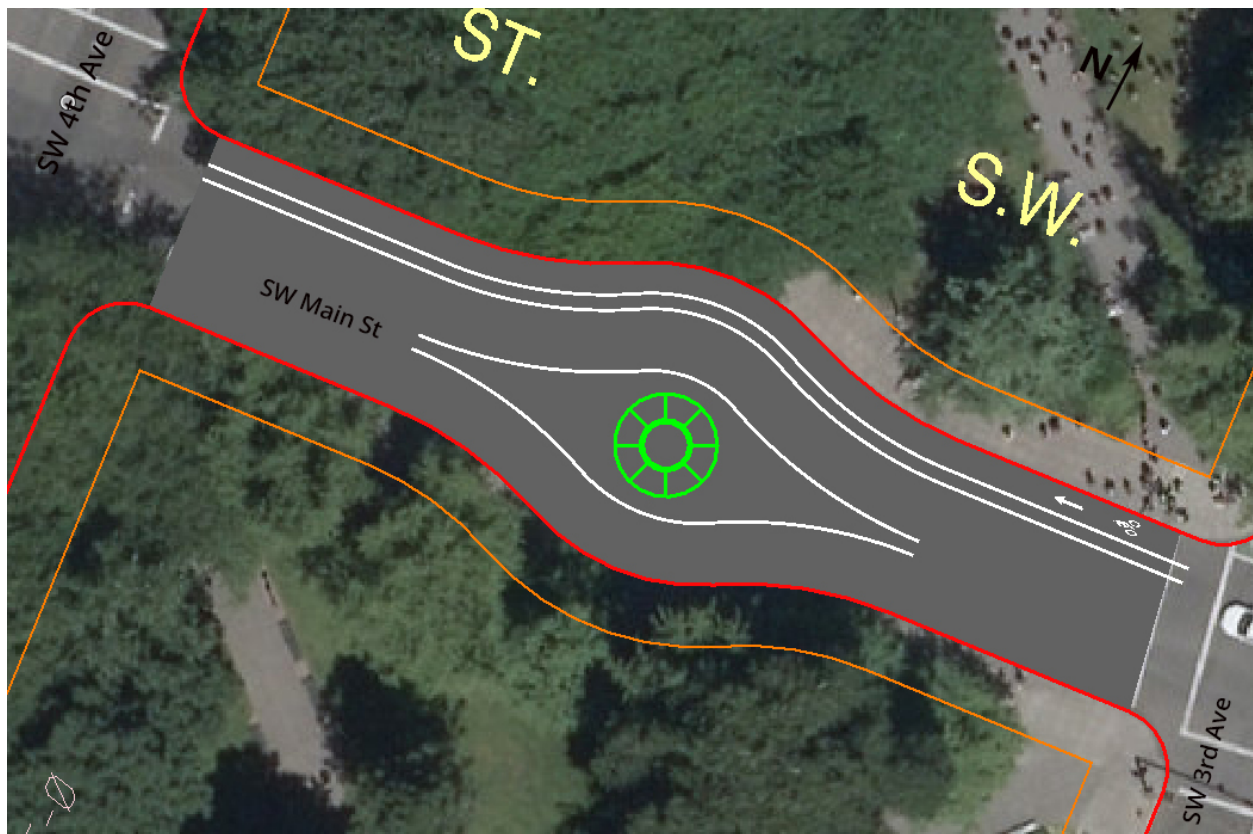






## Path Forward

In the spring of 2021, the City Arts Program convened discussions with Council Offices and Stakeholder Bureaus—including Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT), PP&R and PWB—expressing support for the Elk (bronze) to return to its original location in the middle of SW Main Street. The stakeholders discussed rebuilding a base that no longer operated as a fountain, citing safety concerns as well as construction and maintenance costs. In this scenario, a new pedestal would be designed and constructed, taking into consideration a westbound bike lane and a wider transit lane for buses. Stakeholders also articulated a goal to replicate the scale and historical “Beaux arts” style of the original pedestal and fountain.



*One of several site parameter options proposed by PBOT in the spring of 2021*



RACC has fully restored the bronze sculpture, at a cost of \$8,000, which was covered by the City's Fine Arts Insurance policy. The City's protest damage claim for the fountain (a separate insurance policy) has not yet been settled, but stakeholders have continued to meet to discuss roles and responsibilities for returning the sculpture to its original location.

In August, 2021, the City asked RACC to lead a design process for a new base for the Elk. As part of this process, the stakeholders agreed that any designer selected for this process should help the City consider multiple options, including options to return the Elk to SW Main Street or to site the sculpture elsewhere, such as in a park. The design process should also evaluate the option of fully restoring/rebuild the fountain, as well as the possibility of design a new base that is not a fountain.

The stakeholders acknowledge that the original location of the Elk on SW Main Street will likely continue to be a place for protests and demonstrations and could lead to future impacts on the Elk if returned there.

We invite feedback from the Historic Landmarks Commission and the public before beginning this design process.

###