

- NEWS**
- BLOGHOUSE
- BUSINESS
- COLUMNISTS
- FRONT PAGE
- HEADLINES
- LOCAL NEWS
- MULTIMEDIA
- NATION/WORLD
- OBITUARIES
- PODCASTS
- POLITICS
- SPECIAL REPORTS
- WEATHER

- FEATURES**
- CALENDAR
- BOOKS
- COLUMNISTS
- COMICS
- ENTERTAINMENT
- FOOD & DINING
- HEALTH
- LIFESTYLES
- MOVIES
- TECHNOLOGY
- TRAVEL
- TV LISTINGS


- OPINION**
- COLUMNISTS
- EDITORIALS
- LETTERS
- PERSPECTIVE
- KEEFE CARTOON
- MESSAGE BOARDS
- WRITE FOR US

- SPORTS**
- AVALANCHE / NHL
- BRONCOS / NFL
- COLLEGES
- COLUMNISTS
- CRUSH / AFL
- EXTREMES
- LACROSSE
- NUGGETS / NBA
- OLYMPICS
- PREPS
- RAPIDS / MLS
- ROCKIES / MLB
- SCORES
- SNOW SPORTS
- OTHER SPORTS

- SERVICES**
- ABOUT US/HELP
- ARCHIVES
- CONTACT US
- E-MAIL NEWS
- INTERNSHIPS
- PERSONALS
- SUBSCRIBE
- TRAFFIC

- ADVERTISING**
- AUTOS
- FANTASY SPORTS
- HOMES
- JOBS
- MARKETPLACE
- MEMORIALS
- NEWSPAPER ADS
- SPORTS CHALLENGE
- WEDDINGS
- YELLOW PAGES

- HOME**
- ETHICS POLICY
- Privacy Policy





[Link To Article](#) [Print Article](#) [Email Article](#)

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denver & the west

Ghost of Aurora's past may star in Colfax revival

The City Council ponders a trolley sculpture for the thoroughfare. Trolleys played a major role in getting the city rolling.

By [Jeremy P. Meyer](#)
Denver Post Staff Writer



This photo illustration of East Colfax Avenue shows what Aurora's new East End Arts District might look like with the addition of a proposed fiberglass sculpture of a trolley. (Special)

Aurora - Motorists on East Colfax Avenue may find themselves doing a double take next year, swearing they'd just seen a trolley car in the median.

At least that's what artist Lawrence Argent hopes will happen with "Ghost Trolley," a translucent, lighted sculpture that's expected to be placed in a median across from the Martin Luther King Jr. Library.

Officials hope "Ghost Trolley" will become a recognizable landmark for Aurora's new East End Arts District in the way Argent's blue bear sculpture has drawn attention to the Colorado Convention Center or his green grass-blade sculpture identifies the city of Englewood.

The Aurora City Council is considering whether to approve the \$94,000 sculpture, paid for by the city's Art in Public Places fund and from a federal block grant.

The composite fiberglass sculpture would be 10 feet tall by 20 feet wide. At most angles, it would look like a squashed representation of a trolley. But from one angle, it would appear as a full-sized trolley rumbling down East Colfax - Argent's salute to Aurora's past.

In 1898, Aurora's founder, Donald Fletcher, built a trolley line to connect his tiny town with thriving Denver.

When Argent was commissioned to create a public piece, he researched Aurora's past and decided the sculpture must include a trolley.

"Aurora wouldn't have been founded unless the transport system moved itself out there," said Argent, an associate art professor at the University of Denver. "The image (of a trolley) was something I wanted to play with. I didn't want to make something real. But I wanted to give the feeling that it could be real."

The trolley would join four other public art displays along the eight blocks of East Colfax from Clinton to Geneva streets. All of the pieces - which

total about \$200,000 - are expected to be installed by next spring.

The city has targeted the area for renewal, hoping to turn it into a funky arts district. More than \$54 million in public and private money has been spent.

However, some have questioned the city's spending money on art, especially during tough financial times.

Don James, president of the Aurora Police Association, sat through a council meeting last month to hear the pitch for Argent's project.

"It's typical," said James, who is upset that the city spends money on art when other programs face cuts because of a budget gap.

However, under a 1993 ordinance, the city provides the Art in Public Places program with funding equivalent to 1 percent of what the city spends on construction and remodeling projects costing more than \$100,000.

"A city is the sum of all of its parts," said city spokesman Jeff Martinez. "Certainly council has identified time and again that their priorities are sound fiscal management and public safety. But there are also plenty of other folks who do support cultivation of the arts and commemoration of the arts."

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