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Lighting the Way in Rosslyn

Ambitious Public Art Project Would Provide a Luminous Look And 'Embrace the City' Through a Stretch of Urban Arlington

By Michael Laris
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Cliff Garten is standing in the Corridor of Light. Except right now it's not so much a Corridor of Light as a strip of asphalt in Rosslyn dotted with a Chipotle, a [McDonald's](#) and a jumble of aging office buildings and new towers.

"You're going to see four on these four corners right here," says Garten, a Venice, Calif.-based artist who last week stood at Lynn and 19th streets. "There will be one between the crosswalk and the tree here."

What there will be, if all goes according to plan, is a succession of soaring and electro-polished stainless steel sculptures, wired with environmentally friendly programmable lights, between the [Key Bridge](#) and the [Iwo Jima](#) Memorial. Garten calls the 20 towers "Luminous Bodies." He also hopes to link the permanent public art installation with reimagined streetlights that would be part of a coordinated display. The works would be in contrast, Garten said, to the "opacity" of the capital's monuments.

The project's backers say they are about halfway to the funding they need for the full project, with \$500,000 raised and \$750,000 to \$1 million promised. The idea is to change the way locals and visitors see Rosslyn by playing around with people's views of the unheralded public infrastructure surrounding them.

Plus, boosters said, it will be good for business.

"The next level of public art has to move to embrace the city at a large scale, which means to work with the city's systems and infrastructure. That could be dealing with water systems. It could be sewer. It could be lighting infrastructure, as it is here," Garten said.

And given the worst financial environment in decades, with tens of millions of county budget cuts in the works and a tax rate increase under consideration, Garten's advocates have answers ready for whatever skepticism might arise about that sort of exploration.

"Public art is a 30-year-old program in Arlington," said Angela Anderson Adams, Arlington's public art administrator, who is participating in the project. Public art has become part of "what I think Arlingtonians have come to expect," she said.



When a piece of land is developed in Rosslyn's commercial district, the county receives, on average, \$500,000 to \$750,000 specifically for public art, Adams said. The contributions stem from negotiations in which the county allows developers to increase the size of their buildings.

Garten's glowing "bodies" will be 21 feet high in some places and 26 feet in others. They will be changeable like chameleons, blue and orange one day, and green and red, say, for Christmas. And backers say the first of them will appear in three to four years.

The Rosslyn Business Improvement District and Rosslyn Renaissance, another area advocate, "are very concerned about giving Rosslyn a new identity, and they are serious about changing the face of Rosslyn," Garten said. The Business Improvement District is helping with the finances. Developers, led by the [JBG Cos.](#), have pledged money to a common pot, giving the project a scope beyond one building or another as part of a broad plan for Rosslyn.

"Instead of ending up with several disparate projects, we end up with a comprehensive urban plan for the street," Garten said. "What Arlington and I are saying is a good public art plan is a good urban plan."