

City of Presidents under fire

■ Some say group that placed statues bypassed city ordinance.

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It's a controversy of presidential proportions — four to be exact.

Rapid City

Some Rapid Citians are saying proper steps were not taken in planning and placing the first four of 40 presidential sculptures on downtown Rapid City street corners.

Last fall, bronze sculptures of presidents Washington, Adams, Reagan and Bush — commissioned by private donations — were placed on Sixth Street sidewalk corners at Main and St. Joseph streets. Plans are to similarly add four presidents each year.

Critics say the City of Presidents project violates a city ordinance. That ordinance says that the Public Art Committee, a subcommittee of the Rapid City Arts Council must give approval to the art work or the site of public art.

Rapid City attorney Jim Leach, speaking on behalf of a group of about 20 concerned citizens, told the Rapid City Arts Council members at their meeting Monday that city ordinance was not followed with the project.

"This is a fundamental issue of democracy," Leach said. "None of the requirements of this ordinance were followed. I don't want to stand up here and debate this aesthetically or artistically, but the public is entitled to be heard."

Leach said the group's goal was to find out exactly what happened in the placing of the public art and to require the City of Presidents group to start with the detailed process before any more of the presidential sculptures go up.

Reached after the Monday meeting, City of Presidents project organizer Don



Dick Kettlewell/Journal staff

Downtown shoppers pass the statue of President George Bush on Monday at the corner of Sixth and Main streets. The four presidential sculptures placed in downtown Rapid City last fall have come under controversy concerning city-approval procedures.

Perdue had little comment.

"I don't think it is appropriate to speak at this point," Perdue said.

Concerned citizen Denise Du Broy said at the meeting that the public was excluded from the process of placing the public art.

"It was taken over by six people in an elitist way," she said.

Du Broy said citizens were never

asked if they wanted Rapid City transformed into the City of Presidents.

"They are insinuating that we begin and end with Mount Rushmore. I find that offensive," she said. "So many business owners and individuals were excluded from public comment on this."

Members of the Public Art Committee

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include Ruth Brennan, Patricia Kenner, Doris Rudel, Lon VanDeusen, Steve Zellmer and RaVae Luckhart.

Luckhart told members of the arts council that City of Presidents organizer Don Perdue did appear before the Public Art Committee, but she does not recall the committee voting on the project.

A copy of the Rapid City Arts Council master plan and collection policy, dated February of 1994, says two majority votes taken at two consecutive

meetings of the Public Art Committee are required for approval of a work of art or its site.

"I guess another system was devised because the presidents are here," Luckhart said.

The group concerned about violation of the ordinance said they would appear before Legal & Finance Committee of the Rapid City Council April 12 and the city council April 16 seeking answers.

Members of the arts council said they wanted a thorough report on the history of the

City of Presidents project from the Public Art Committee before they would take any formal action.

"We've only heard one side of this issue," said arts council member Kent Mundon.

Mundon offered a motion to table the matter until the council received a report from the Public Art Committee. Luckhart assured the board that she would gather committee members and provide them the needed information before the city council meetings in April.