

Local/Regional

Trustees drop opposition to planned mural

By MICHAEL TERAULT
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GREENFIELD — The town's Trustees of the Soldier Memorials plan to tell selectmen today they have dropped their opposition to a planned mural overlooking the Veterans Mall downtown, following a meeting with the artist Thursday.

Trustees Chairman Paul Coughlin said the panel voted unanimously to support the mural after the artist, Janet Braun-Reinitz, described changes in the mural's design and new plans to use pigments that are resistant to fading. She had earlier agreed to tone down some of the bright colors to which the trustees had objected previously.

Coughlin said he will deliver a letter to selectmen today indicating the trustees' "change of heart."

"The trustees are not opposed to the painting of the mural as long as the people of Greenfield want it and the upkeep proposed by the originators is carried on," Coughlin read from the letter.

Rebekka Tippens of Colrain, coordinator of the project, said she was not sure when work would start on the mural, which would be located on the eastern wall of the Borofsky block overlooking the Veterans Mall. An issue over approvals needed to set up scaffolding along the driveway in front of the wall needs to be resolved.

Tippens said she hopes the scaffolding could be set up Saturday, that patching and priming of the wall could be done Sunday and that the volunteers working on the project can begin drawing Braun-Reinitz's mural design on the wall with chalk beginning Monday.

But Town Manager Norman E. Thidemann said Thursday that selectmen must approve the setting up

the scaffolding on what is considered a public way.

Thidemann said the road there is jointly owned by the town and the owner of the Borofsky building, Joel Artenstein of Pelham. Six feet belong to Artenstein and six feet belong to the town. But because the road is considered a "joint, shared right of way," Thidemann said, the selectmen's approval will be needed.

"If anybody's going to do anything in the road, they need the permission of the board of selectmen," Thidemann said.

Tippens said she understood from the local public works department that no approval would be needed as long as the scaffolding stays on the side of the road owned by Artenstein. The rest of the road would be left open.

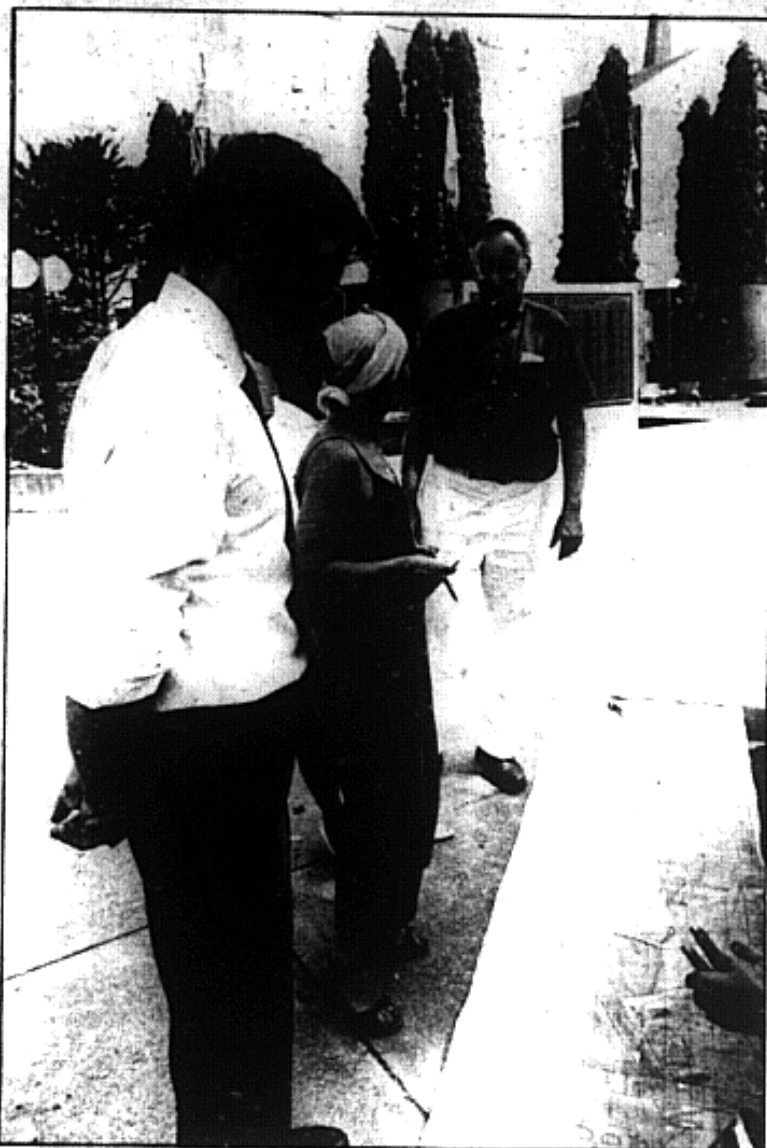
Thidemann maintains the board's approval is necessary. The selectmen, who are on a summer schedule, meet every other week rather than weekly. Their next regularly scheduled meeting is Aug. 28.

But Thidemann said the board could "expedite" the process, either by calling a special meeting before then to consider the issue or by coming into the selectmen's office in the town hall on their own time and signing their approval.

If three selectmen sign it, the muralist will have the board's permission to set up the scaffolding, Thidemann said. The selectmen would then follow up with a formal vote at their next meeting, Thidemann said.

"Assuming they sign it," Thidemann said.

Building Inspector Bruce Austin has ruled that the planned mural does not need special permit approval, even though Town Attorney Edward P. Smith has said otherwise. Thidemann said Austin's determination is the governing decision in this case.



Recorder/Peter MacDonald

Building Inspector Bruce Austin, foreground, looks at mural sketch while Peter Miller, chairman of the Greenfield Historical Commission, right, discusses possible changes with artist Janet Braun-Reinitz.

Smith determined earlier this week that the mural — a celebration of Greenfield's history — can be considered a sign and therefore subject to the town's sign regulations. The mural's size makes it in violation of the size requirements for signs, under the town's zoning bylaws, Smith has said. He said that the zoning board would have to issue a special permit for the mural.

But Austin had earlier given his permission for the mural, saying it

did not qualify as a sign by his reading of the bylaws. The town decided to let that ruling stand.

If the muralists get permission to erect the scaffolding, they should be able to start the mural — unless someone attempts to appeal the building inspector's determination.

Tippens and Braun-Reinitz were at the Veterans Mall Thursday soliciting comments about the proposed mural from passersby.