

BELLEVUE ARTS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES

July 10, 2018
4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E -118

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Manfredi, Commissioners Gulati, Jackson, Lau Hui, Lewis, Malkin

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Wolfteich

STAFF PRESENT: Joshua Heim, Scott MacDonald, Department of Planning and Community Development

OTHERS PRESENT: Councilmember Stokes

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:32 p.m. by Chairperson Manfredi who presided. All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Gulati, who arrived at 4:40 p.m., and Commissioner Wolfteich, who was excused.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

A. Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Lewis. The motion was seconded was by Commissioner Malkin and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the June 5, 2018, minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Malkin. The motion was seconded was by Commissioner Lewis and the motion carried unanimously.

3. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. ACTION ITEMS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. 2018 Bellwether Program Update

Mr. Ben Beres with BeresSuttonCuller reported that there were 54 confirmed artists, including some poetry readings and some music. He noted the September 14 opening night celebration will be at the Bellevue Arts Museum. There will be two Saturdays during the exhibition; during the first one there will be events at Compass Plaza, and during the second there will be events at Downtown Park. The entire second floor of the Bellevue Arts Museum will house works from the exhibition, and works will be sited at City Hall as well. He said the music and poetry performers are still being identified.

Mr. Beres along with John Sutton with BeresSuttonCuller reviewed with the Commissioners the artists who will be involved, shared examples of their work, and indicated where they will be displayed. Mr. Beres said on the two Saturdays people will be hired to wear spinning arrows intended to point out things, including performances. He noted that several of the works will be interactive.

Commissioner Malkin asked if QR codes will be utilized to help inform the audience. Mr. Beres said the marketing piece has not been fully fleshed out yet.

Commissioner Malkin asked if there will be performances or live events at the Bellevue Arts Museum. Mr. Sutton said there will be, including both music and poetry readings. Details about scheduling and access are still being worked out.

Commissioner Jackson asked how the overall budget was working out compared to previous year Bellwether exhibitions. Arts Program Coordinator Scott MacDonald said the previous total project budget was \$270,000, about \$50,000 of which went for the installation contract. Funds were also expended for permitting and advertising, which left about \$65,000 that went to the artists. The current budget is between \$95,000 and \$100,000, with less to be spent on installations and more on artists. Additionally, many of the works will have longer lives than in the past.

Commissioner Jackson asked about the mural to be located in the Bellevue Arts Museum parking garage, noting that the driveway is narrow and the lighting in the garage is not all that good. Mr. Sutton said there are stairways and elevators that serve the garage. The team will work with the Bellevue Arts Museum to post information about the work, which will also be highlighted on the Bellwether map.

Commissioner Lau Hui suggested that people should be discouraged from walking down the driveway. Mr. Sutton agreed pedestrian access only signs may need to be posted.

Commissioner Malkin commented that the staircase leading down to the garage could be another opportunity for illustration. Mr. MacDonald said that was a good point. Mr. Sutton added that a similar conversation was held with the Meydenbauer Center about their garage space in regard to the Grand Connection. They love the idea but the focus during the exhibition will be more narrowly focused.

Commissioner Malkin asked if the \$5000 in the budget for photography and video was enough to adequately document all that will be going on. Arts Program Manager Joshua Heim said that issue will need to be addressed. He allowed that there is an intent to document everything. Mr. Sutton said ideally all the documentation videos and photos will ultimately be posted to the city's website.

Chair Manfredi said the new format is a major transition away from what Bellwether has been in the past. It addresses the concerns, interests and the aspirations of the Commission and others to bolster the city's creative assets. He said he was heartened to see the enthusiastic responses from artists.

Mr. Heim said he has been working with the city's economic development staff who have helped to secure a \$20,000 grant to be used for marketing to tourists. He said a graphic designer has been hired to develop the advertisements, the maps, the brochures and the posters. He shared with the Commissioners three brand concepts. The first option, "Conceal and Reveal," included a color pallet of gray and orange and incorporated overlapping planes represent different creative disciplines.

Commissioner Jackson suggested that gray and orange is overdone.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Gulati, Mr. Heim said within the scope of the work for the graphic designer, he will work to develop posters, maps, postcards, email flyers and social media banners. There will also be a website.

Commissioner Malkin asked if the branding effort will be tied to the current Bellwether only or subsequent Bellwether exhibitions. Mr. Sutton said it is intended to brand the event, particularly in typeset and look. The colors may change over time. Mr. Heim added that the branding exercise is intended to get an image stuck in the minds of the public that is tied to the event. Conceal and Reveal would be the concept behind everything moving forward.

Chair Manfredi said he liked the Conceal and Reveal idea. He called it intriguing, stimulating and hightech-esque, but said it did feel a bit corporate.

Mr. Beres said the “be” and “we” stuck out to him. He agreed it felt a bit corporate but said it also has an element of class that the other two options do not have.

Commissioner Gulati said if a Bellwether brand is going to be created and used in the coming years, the focus should be on giving a glimpse of the event so people can know what it references. She said she liked the idea of changing shapes and colors year by year, but the core branding graphics should not change over time. More money will need to be spent in the early years to gain brand recognition and connection.

Mr. Heim said Concept B was titled “Stagger and Reach.” He noted that it was inspired by real brands and focused on referencing the idea of connections and boundary crossing.

Commissioner Jackson said Concept B appeared to be more family friendly. It makes it clear the focus is on people from downtown Bellevue along with attendees from businesses. Intellectually there is a question about whether or not Bellwether should be split into two words. She suggested that even among native English speakers, the majority likely do not know what “bellwether” means and may think the word has been misspelled when seen as a separate word.

Mr. Sutton said he liked the green and blue colors, though he said there was something very Seattle about them.

Chair Manfredi said he liked the lines and the way they ran off the image.

Mr. Heim noted that Concept C was titled “Patterned Infills.” In it the graphic artist used different patterns to reference the different types of genres and programming found in Bellwether.

Commissioner Gulati suggested Concept C could play well over the years. The patterns and colors could change while retaining the main graphic of the circle and the B without having it get old.

Commissioner Lau Hui said she found it to be somewhat busy. She allowed that it is very kid friendly.

Mr. Beres agreed the B in the circle log could be timeless, but he said overall it felt a little kitschy or 1997 to him.

Commissioner Jackson agreed and said it felt somewhat quilty to her. While that may be cozy and friendly to some, for others it may not work. Mr. Sutton allowed that the arts and crafts look and feel may play more into the annual arts fairs. He suggested it would be better to use a design that makes Bellwether stand on its own. He said he saw good elements in each concept but felt that somehow no one of them was quite right. Commissioner Jackson said she was thrilled to see three such different concepts.

Mr. Heim said he would share the feedback with the graphic artist and have him make some revisions.

Mr. Heim also informed the Commissioners that a public art intern has been hired to help out during the time Mr. MacDonald will be on parental leave. If all goes well, she will stay on through the fall and potentially into the winter to assist with general public art program issues. She is a graduate student in urban planning and she just finished an internship at Urban Artworks, the youth mural program in Seattle.

Mr. Heim said the marketing coordinator who has been hired will be addressing public relations, social media strategy and paid advertising strategy. He said in the past there has been no focus on enabling participating artists to be brand ambassadors and to activate their networks. Part of the scope written in for the marketing coordinator is to come up with an artist outreach toolkit and to work with every single artist with a focus on advancing Bellwether. An unsolicited proposal has been received from the Bellevue Downtown Association around marketing as well which will add to the overall impact through outreach to people who live in downtown Bellevue and to those who work at Bellevue Square.

B. 2019 Bellwether Program Discussion

Mr. Heim said the thinking is that by the time the current Bellwether event wraps up, the curator for the 2019 Bellwether event should be on board. He said time will be taken to review the lessons learned, both what went well and what did not go so well.

Mr. Heim reminded the Commissioners that the Bellwether exhibition has been themed since 2010. He distributed a handout listing all of the themes chosen over the years along with a blurb about each. The first theme was focused on sustainability and every year since the theme has been a play on the original theme.

Mr. Heim from the Commissioners potential themes around which to organize the 2019 event and offered several suggestions, beginning with the idea of a new city monument. He noted that a couple of years ago Philadelphia ran a program called Monument Lab that was an outgrowth of a university class in which a professor and his students researched the untold story of the city of Philadelphia. That pivoted in 2017 to a program of art making. A total of 20 temporary monuments were commissioned throughout the city. The take locally is that Bellevue is a fairly new city. There are officially monuments or memorials in the city: the elm trees in Downtown Park which is a WWI memorial; there is a WWII memorial in Downtown Park as well, the Belvedere Fountain; Guanyin, which was given to the city as a gift following 9-11; and the statue of Gandhi, which was a gift from the government of India. None of the works memorialize something that occurred in Bellevue. The idea is to organize a Bellwether around what has happened in Bellevue that should be memorialized.

Commissioner Jackson asked if the notion is to change the tenor of Bellwether by focusing on new city monuments. Mr. Heim said the theme for the 2018 Bellwether is Connections, which was predicated on the notion of the Grand Connection art and culture master plan. A great deal of exploration has gone into what the space should be in the future, and Bellwether is intended to serve as an expression of what a cultural corridor should look like.

Mr. Sutton said the perspective of BeresSuttonCuller has been on making Bellwether an annual event curated each time with different themes that build on the previous theme. He said it felt a bit off to him to try coming up with a theme for 2019 before the 2018 iteration has even happened. He allowed that it would be good to begin thinking about the type of curator to bring on board, someone who could look at what is happening currently and what will be happening with the Grand Connection in the future. Ultimately, Bellwether should push the Grand Connection and that things that are happening that still need to happen to make that plan come to life. The monument idea, while a good idea, does not seem to fit in with the Grand Connection theme.

Commissioner Malkin asked how much of the Grand Connection will be developed by the time of the 2019 Bellwether. Mr. Heim said the intersection adjacent to Compass Plaza will be built by then. The Grand Connection itself is programmatic and will come online over a period of time. The idea of a cultural plinth was a big piece of the Grand Connection and Bellwether, and what will be needed is a curator to come in and advise in regard to what should be honored and put on the cultural plinths. There really are no curators who are generalists; curators are sought out because of their particular expertise.

Chair Manfredi shared the concern voiced by Mr. Sutton. He said the monuments idea could diminish the breadth of the general Grand Connection theme. He allowed that the focus could move things in a substantive direction, which would not necessarily be a bad thing.

Commissioner Jackson said the last theme was very specific in calling for the creation of a series of pop-up, immersive cultural bazaars and experiences celebrating Bellevue's diverse population groups. She said she was having trouble in her mind reconciling the old Bellevue Sculpture Exhibition and the Bellwether approach with its sense of movement along a corridor with the very specific monuments proposal.

Mr. Heim asked what the Commissioners would like to see a curator contemplate and develop an artist roster around. Commissioner Malkin said he liked the notion of visioning the future of the Grand Connection and its potential. The future will not yet been reached in 2019 but the visioning of the potential should be continued.

Mr. Sutton said he did not mean to imply that Bellwether should only be about the Grand Connection. No matter how much or how little gets developed along the route, Bellwether should be a permanent, year-round amazing celebration. He said of the three proposed themes, he liked the International Street approach best given that it is about community and all of the different cultures coming together.

Commissioner Gulati agreed and said the theme could bring in art in various forms and traditions.

Chair Manfredi left the meeting and handed the gavel to Commissioner Malkin.

Commissioner Lau Hui said it was important to her to continue pushing the envelope of the exhibition and keeping the momentum going. Whatever theme is chosen, the real focus should be on pushing the envelope. That should be the message to the curator.

Mr. MacDonald said there is a question of brand. The current Bellwether involves the creation of a new brand, and what will bring people back every year is how they connect with the brand. That will not mean doing the same thing every year, rather it will involve building on experiences while also trying new things, all without taking an entirely new approach every year.

Mr. Heim said one of the things that provides continuity in temporary art would be the assumption that all of the works would be contemporary art. One way the monuments theme could fit that assumption would be to have a highly conceptual avant garde performance artist do a historical reenactment. It could be funny and edgy and in line with all that is being done. The name Bellwether is tied to the notion of a sign of things to come, and simply taking the same approach every year may not in fact be a sign of things to come.

Commissioner Gulati allowed that every year there should be evidence of growth and a notch up, but it should all be predicated on the same base idea of the Grand Connection.

Commissioner Malkin said the model of having works commissioned for Bellwether, if continued, will mean the theme will be whatever the Commission decides. The question is whether or not Bellwether should be given a brand that is followed up on and highlighted every year, or whether each year the event should start from scratch with a new theme. Mr. MacDonald said that is the core question. The sculpture exhibition was pretty much the same for 26 years, with a very slow evolution toward a more contemporary focus. People did identify with that brand, but Bellwether will clearly evoke a different brand with the upcoming show. The opportunity is at hand to take the brand and make it about the future, about change, about exploring new ideas and art forms, and looking at things from different perspectives. The alternative is to create Bellwether 2.0 and do essentially the same thing for the next 26 years.

Commissioner Malkin suggested the Commission would not want to see the latter occur. There should be some continuity, not a reinventing of the event every year. The Grand Connection will be the foundation for Bellwether for the next few years, largely because it will become where the art lives. That will allow for the underlying theme, the content, to be new each year without the creation of a new core.

Mr. Heim said he was hearing from the Commission that the core was the place and the vision for the future, which will include a hundred different parts ranging from digital tech-drive art to cultural festivals and new monuments in the city's cultural corridor. He suggested just taking one component every year and testing it.

Commissioner Jackson asked Mr. Heim if he envisioned simply dropping a lot of the more general things. She pointed out that with the exception of the spoken and musical elements, BeresSuttonCullen are more generalists in terms of the visual arts. She asked if bringing on board a specialist curator will result in works that are all in line with that person's specialty. Mr. Heim said he envisioned the decision making all done by the Arts Commission. The work of a curator is totally about making and relying on connections. The 54 artists that are signed up did not come on board because of any connection the Commission has with them, rather it was because of their connection to the curator team.

Commissioner Lau Hui asked if BeresSuttonCullen could be contracted for another year. Mr. Heim said that could be done. Commissioner Lau Hui said the team clearly has a good understanding of what Bellwether is about and would be a good choice to carry the theme forward next year. Commissioner Gulati agreed and said she liked the idea for the consistency it would bring. Commissioner Lau Hui said after the second year under the new brand, it might be easier to hand it off to someone else.

Commissioner Malkin said he was not sure the Commission was quite ready to make that decision. He said he liked the idea of a new curator coming in with a new vision, and the idea of thinking about and building on a base theme of inventing the future.

Answering a question asked by Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Heim said it would be possible to put out a request for proposals from curators. That would, however, defer the decision making to the curator. He said he would rather hear from the Arts Commission about what it wants to commission. Commissioner Malkin said the RFP would entail having curators start with and work with an agreed-to theme.

Commissioner Jackson said her primary concern was the need to avoid throwing the baby out with the bathwater. There has been no determination by the Commission that the change is needed, so an approach that seeks a complete change every year should be avoided. The better approach would be to think about what has been successful and to build on that. Going from ten \$3000 commissions to one \$30,000 commission may not have the same outreach and popularity. Getting too didactic or too focused on one curator's specialty may result in just that and have trigger the loss of the brand. One of Bellwether's points of success has been that it involved an open call and a jury selection process. The Arts Commission has been involved in the scoping of the call, the theme and the presentations of the art works to the jury.

Mr. Heim allowed that the Commission was clearly not ready to vote on anything regarding the 2019 Bellwether program. With the Commission not meeting again until September, any decision will be pushed back by two months. He said he would mull over the comments and work with Chair Manfredi in developing an approach.

C. Bel-Red Streetscape Planning Artist

Mr. MacDonald reported that on July 9 the selection panel chaired by Commissioner Gulati met and interviewed four artists. The panel's first ballot was unanimous for the selection of Jill Anholt. The panel liked the fact that Ms. Anholt demonstrated a strong ability to go from contemporary to permanent artworks, and how to be additive on top of a permanent work to allow for ongoing change. The panel believed Ms. Anholt understood the streetscape project better than the other applicants. All three of the projects she presented during her interview were planning projects that went on to a permanent art work within the broader planning project. Of all the finalists, the panel felt her art work was the most visually and conceptually beautiful.

Mr. MacDonald said the first phase of the project has a budget of \$20,000 for the planning work. As part of that element, the artist will develop three concepts for early implementation. The Commission will made the final decision as to whether or not to pursue any of the concepts. The second phase of the project will be paid for through the urban boulevards program, which makes the project unique.

The Commissioners were shown the art works presented to the panel by the artist.

Commissioner Lau Hui asked if the project budget was reasonable. Mr. MacDonald said the question came up at the panel as well. He said it must be assumed that artists know how to complete their work within the budget for any project for which they are applying. Project budgets are made clear as part of the application process.

A motion to accept the panel's recommendation of Jill Anholt to serve as the planning artist for the Bel-Red streetscape project was made by Commissioner Gulati. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Jackson and the motion carried unanimously.

5. COMMISSION QUICK BUSINESS – None

6. REPORTS

- A. Commissioner's Committee and Lead Reports – As Noted
 - B. Project Updates from Staff – As Noted
7. CORRESPONDENCE, INFORMATION
- A. Written Correspondence – As Noted
 - B. Information – As Noted
 - i. Committees – As Noted
8. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Malkin adjourned the meeting at 6:44 p.m.