

BELLEVUE ARTS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES

October 6, 2015
4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E -120

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Commissioners Jackson, Lau Hui, Lewis, Madan, Malkin, Wolfeich

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Chairperson Manfredi

STAFF PRESENT: Mary Pat Byrne, Scott MacDonald, Department of Planning and Community Development

OTHERS PRESENT: Jessica Lambert, Venues for Art in the Local Area (VALA); Karen Abel, ArtsEast; Joan Wittler, Evergreen Association of Fine Arts (EAFA)

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:31 p.m. by Commissioner Malkin who presided. All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners Jackson and Lewis, who arrived at 4:33 p.m., and Chair Manfredi, who was excused.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

A. Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Wolfeich. Second was by Commissioner Lau Hui and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the September 1, 2015, minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Wolfeich. Second was by Commissioner Lau Hui and the motion carried unanimously.

3. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. ACTION ITEMS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. VALA/ArtsEast/EAFA Panel Discussion

Arts Program Manager Mary Pat Byrne introduced the panelists and said her reason for calling them together was to give the Commission a better understanding of what their organizations do, what challenges they face, and what opportunities they see.

Joan Wittler, Evergreen Association of Fine Arts (EAFA) president, said the all-volunteer non-profit organization began in 1975 with six members. It now has more than 200 members and it continues to grow. About 65 percent of the members reside in Bellevue; the balance live in

the broader Puget Sound area. She gave a description of their membership, programs, and current initiatives including a grant program and their public art program.

The organization conducts monthly meetings throughout the school year and takes the summer months off. The meetings are held at the Bellevue Presbyterian Church. Steps are being taken to hold an evening meeting as well to accommodate artist schedules. The meetings include a lecture and demonstration by an advanced artist from the community. EAFA also offers an online newsletter, and has three juried shows annually.

Karen Able, executive director of ArtsEast, said the organization has been in existence for ten years. The first five years was spent in gathering artists and dreaming about what could be done. The organization continues to evolve, building its programs and awareness. There are about 250 members that include both artists and arts supporters. Well over ten thousand people are served annually through the organization's various programs. The organization is based in downtown Issaquah but it serves the entire Eastside.

The most visible thing done by ArtsEast is a retail gallery. About half of the 3500 square-foot building on First Street in downtown Issaquah is dedicated to a retail gallery in which member's works are shown and sold. The gallery is completely artist envisioned, managed, driven, marketed and staffed. Steps are being taken to market in new and more aggressive ways.

ArtsEast has a wide range of programs offered to artists and the Eastside community including 10-12 shows annually, many of which include town hall-type programs to add depth and draw people, community events, and up to 150 educational workshops serving about 1200 students a year which are attended mostly by adults, although some youth workshops are offered.

Jessica Lambert, executive director of Venues for Art in the Local Area (VALA) said the organization began in 2010. She said she and her husband co-founded the organization because of the apparent disconnect between the community and the arts programming in Redmond. At the time the Redmond Arts Commission was going through a large transition period, there was no Kirkland Art Center, but there were a lot of artists. What was missing was a non-profit arts organization to mobilize the artists and connect with the city. Things mobilized once the Redmond Arts Commission found its footing.

Ms. Lambert said VALA is based in Redmond and considers itself to be an Eastside organization meeting the needs of Eastside artists. There is a clear lack of venues, studio space and installation space, and the mission of the organization is to connect artists with artists, artists with the community, and the community with the arts. The organization's programming is currently focused on public/private partnerships.

VALA works to create opportunities for artists and the arts. The educational programs provided are primarily focused on adults, though steps are being taken to include the younger generation. A pilot program was launched early in 2015 in which seven artists were invited to come in and set up shop and the response was good. The notion is being expanded to provide space to artists at low cost. VALA partners with the Redmond Town Center on the annual Redmond Arts Festival.

Ms. Lambert explained VALA's funding structure and sources as a non-member organization that includes both public and private support.

Asked by Ms. Byrne to explain how the individual organizations differ, Ms. Able said the permanent bricks and mortar retail gallery and a space in which to offer classes is an obvious

difference. The income earned is mostly returned to the working artists. The rent on the space is very high even though it is below market rate. There is a tremendous amount of overlap among the artists with the three different organizations, which is possible by not being tied to political boundaries.

Ms. Byrne asked what the biggest challenges being faced, Ms. Wittler said EAFA is facing the challenge of finding a new home. The hope is that a place will be found on the Eastside to facilitate the members who do not want to travel far. The Design Center location where the organization was housed originally was a great space, but it was not possible to achieve the goal in terms of foot traffic.

Ms. Lambert commented that critical mass is a primary concern. There is no question the organization has the talent, the artists and the content, but unless a critical mass is achieved in terms of traffic it will be difficult to succeed. It is also essential to consider the demographics of the artists in the organization. What VALA has seen is a rise in the number of emerging artists who are older, and the economic drivers are different for them.

Ms. Able stated that what most artists need is a dedicated, significant space in which they can be messy in creating art. Many artists are lost to Seattle and other places as they become more advanced and need space in which to work collaboratively and connect with other artists. Society generally understands the needs of performing artists when it comes to practice and performance space, but society is less well informed about the needs visual artists have for space.

Asked by Ms. Byrne to comment on opportunities, Ms. Lambert said VALA believes the answer to success lies in partnerships.

Ms. Wittler said there is opportunity in open dialog between arts groups and organizations. Arté in Kirkland, a development that when opened will have residents on the top floors and retail on the ground floor, will include a small gallery. What artists are seeking in Seattle should be recreated on the Eastside, and the primary need is space.

Asked what, aside from money is needed to make the organizations more successful in meeting their respective missions. Ms. Able said ArtsEast needs passionate people who are leaders. As yet there are no clear answers relative to where the organization is going and how it will be able to sustain itself 20 years into the future. In a strange way, gridlock, traffic and lane tolls can be seen as the impetus for arts organizations to collaborate in real ways without impacting each other's customer base, most of whom prefer to stay close to home.

Ms. Lambert concurred with the need to improve collaboration and communication. It would be helpful to have an Eastside arts website that is not linked to any specific city. There is a real need to let artists and the public know about where things are.

Ms. Byrne asked if there is any particular technical assistance arts groups could benefit from receiving. Ms. Able said the boards could certainly benefit from leadership training as well as training on how to move forward into e-commerce. Ms. Wittler said communication is a huge issue relative to how to get the word out about what is being done. Ms. Lambert said the groups could benefit from learning how to develop an audience and what it is that will bring people in the door.

Commissioner Wolfteich asked how much exposure the organizations have on social media networks as a tool to enhance connectiveness. Ms. Lambert said VALA is pretty savvy about using social media. Even so, people do not know the organization and what it does.

Ms. Able said ArtsEast ranks about average when it comes to using social media. Ms. Wittler suggested that EAFA is a bit below average in that arena, primarily because the members are older.

Commissioner Madan said as a working artist he is always surprised to learn of an organization that has been in place for a long time. That is evidence of a communication problem. The Eastside has a problem in connecting with the general audience and one thing that could help would be to get included in the art section of the *Bellevue Reporter*, the *Issaquah Reporter* and the *Redmond Reporter*, each of which is part of the same parent company. The publications are widely distributed on the Eastside.

Ms. Able commented that ArtsEast enjoys good press coverage in the *Issaquah Reporter*, but only occasionally does a story appear in all three papers. When they do, the results are noticeable.

Commissioner Madan suggested it would be beneficial to have an Eastside distribution list for arts organizations to use in getting the word out about upcoming events. Ms. Lambert said 4Culture does that to some degree. It would be great to have an app people could click on and know instantly what is going on. Ms. Byrne said that can be done with Facebook. There is also an app called NextDoor that focuses on issues and events associated with limited areas. Additionally, the StQRy app allows organizations that pay for subscriptions to easily post events.

Commissioner Malkin said his experience has been that the news media will pick up newsworthy events once they receive a press release. Newsworthy events include curated or juried shows where the curator or jurors are well known. He added that ArtsFund has a very active online presence and that organization provides training for the ArtsFund associates.

Mr. MacDonald said Seattle pulls a lot of funding dollars from the Eastside, and also pulls a lot of artists who may live on the Eastside but who want to work in Seattle or otherwise engage with the Seattle art scene. That speaks to the issue of critical mass. The issue of creating a critical mass on the Eastside begs the question of addressing demographics, cultural as well as age. Overall, Bellevue's residents are getting older, while residents in Downtown are getting younger. Redmond is getting younger across the board. Statistically, younger persons are more likely to attend arts events. He asked what the organizations are doing to look to the future and address the changing demographics on the Eastside.

Ms. Able said her organization has spent a lot of time focused on that issue. The conclusion reached was that the demographic shift offers a number of opportunities. Art is an antidote to cocooning behind a computer, and the younger generation of art users and supports, as well as artists, demand engagement in ways that have not been seen in a long time. The performing arts and museum entities have understood that for a long time and have developed audience engagement strategies. The same approach needs to be taken by the visual arts community.

Ms. Able commented that the Arts Commission is well connected in a much bigger city than the three organizations. She said what ArtsEast needs is leaders, people with vision, and young people who want to roll up their sleeves and get involved in driving the arts forward. Ms. Wittler agreed, as did Ms. Lambert who added that Bellevue has the critical mass opportunity that the other cities do not have.

5. COMMISSION QUICK BUSINESS – None

6. REPORTS

- A. Commissioners' Committee and Lead Reports
- B. Project Updates from Staff

Ms. Byrne announced that since the packet was put together an offer to donate art was received. It was created by Verena Schwippert, and currently owned by Betsy Blackstock, who will be moving soon and can't take the artwork along. The city owns two works by Ms. Schwippert, *Giga Now* and *Water, Precious Water*, that were acquired through past sculpture exhibitions; both are sited in Downtown Park. As a resident of Surrey Downs, Ms. Blackstock would like the work to be sited in Surrey Downs Park. The park is set for a major redesign and staff are amenable to siting the work temporarily in the park and then relocating it in a permanent location consistent with the redesign of the park. Moving and installing the work, plus future maintenance would be the responsibility of the Public Art Program.

Ms. Byrne said it will be up to the Commission to determine whether or not all criteria for accepting art can be met, and to vote on whether or not the piece should be accepted into the City's collection. She proposed forming a committee and recommended Commissioners Lau Hui, Madan and Malkin because of their backgrounds in visual art.

Ms. Byrne shared with the Commission new information regarding resiting *Wild in the City*, a work that was at the Bellefield Office Park that had to be removed to accommodate a utilities project ahead of the Sound Transit East Link project. Two sites have been identified: near the courthouse in the Bellefield Office Park, and along 112th Avenue SE. The 112th Avenue SE site has good visibility but is close to Mercer Slough and as such will require several months to obtain the necessary permits. Additionally, the underlying peat soils will require siting the work on either piles or geofoam. The courthouse site is known to be unevenly settling that may or may not continue. It is likely that anything sited there will need to be constantly readjusted over time. For the long run, the courthouse site does not appear to be the best choice. Accordingly, focus will be given to the 112th Avenue SE site.

Ms. Byrne announced that she would be leaving the city effective November 30. She said she has been with the city for 28 years and plans to retire. She said an open call will be made to fill her vacancy.

Mr. MacDonald reported that the opening celebration for the Newport Hills art installation has been scheduled for October 17 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The contract for the artist has been extended to October 9 by which time the work is expected to be completed.

- 7. CORRESPONDENCE, INFORMATION – As Noted
 - A. Written Correspondence
 - B. Information
 - 1. Future Agenda Items
 - 2. Committees
- 8. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Malkin adjourned the meeting at 6:24 p.m.