

BELLEVUE ARTS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES

August 4, 2020
4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Virtual Meeting

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Aldredge, Wolfteich

STAFF PRESENT: Scott MacDonald, Manette Stamm, Jennifer Ewing, Philly Marsh, Department of Planning and Community Development

OTHERS PRESENT: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m. by Chair Malkin who presided. All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners Aldredge and Wolfteich, both of whom were 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 Lau Hui and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the July 7, 2020, minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Lewis. The motion was seconded was by Commissioner Lau Hui and the motion carried unanimously.

3. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. ACTION ITEMS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Environmental Stewardship Plan Update

Environmental Stewardship Program Manager Jennifer Ewing informed the Commission that the city is in the process of updating the Environmental Stewardship Plan. The work will include updating some overarching environmental goals and targets, and will include a list of actions to achieve them. The Environmental Stewardship Initiative, started in 2007, is the city's sustainability program. It has grown and evolved over the years and has been regularly updated. The City Council directed the current review and analysis of the plan, and directed engagement with the city's boards and commissions and to seek input. Staff have also conducted a couple of rounds of outreach and engagement with the public to gain input

around the visions and the goals and the potential actions for the plan. The timeline calls for having the draft plan before the Council later in the year and Council adoption by the end of the year.

Ms. Ewing said the process to date has included developing a suite a long-term goals and targets around things like reducing greenhouse gases emissions, renewable energy and zero waste of resources. While Bellevue has for some time had such goals, in some cases the goals are out of date and in need of being refreshed and aligned with King County and other regional partners. In addition to long-range 2050 goals, shorter-term 2030 goals are being drafted.

The work of updating the Environmental Stewardship Plan is building on the work done to date with the Environmental Stewardship Initiative, but it is acknowledged that what is in the current plan and what will be done in the coming five years will not necessarily be enough to achieve the long-term goals.

The public engagement process began early in March ahead of the Covid-19 shutdown. There was a good attendance at the open house. The outreach effort then was shifted to online in the form of a survey, presentations and a town hall, followed with focus groups with various businesses and associations. The youth have also been engaged in the planning process.

Ms. Ewing shared with the Commission several of the draft actions, starting with the notion of a sustainable district. The approach exists in some cities around the country in the form of neighborhoods where the main businesses and property managers have come together to set their own environmental goals that are in line with the city goals. Some models are focused on purely environmental goals, while others look at sustainability more broadly and include affordability and equity. Locally there has been some exploration of how the concept might fit with the arts district idea.

With regard to mobility and land use, Ms. Ewing said the transportation department is looking at developing a comprehensive mobility implementation plan. That plan will focus largely on commuting, but it will also consider how people get around to different events and retail destinations. The Commute Trip Reduction program, which has been in place for many years, is focused on helping businesses plan for how their employees get to work, but it has the potential to support other types of organizations with trip planning. Arts organizations could be involved in some of those efforts and take advantage of those resources.

On the energy side, the notion is how arts organizations might increase their access to energy efficiencies or renewable energy programs. The Environmental Stewardship Initiative ran a couple of solarize campaigns aimed at helping residents and small businesses install solar panels, but where groups of 30 or more work together on such projects, they can see the costs reduced. As part of those programs, the KidsQuest museum and the Bellevue Boys & Girls Club received free solar installations.

The draft actions in regard to zero waste include potentially banning single-use plastics. Arts organizations could possibly find ways to reduce waste resulting from the production of art and arts events, and take advantage of the resources the city has to offer to help increase their recycling.

Ms. Ewing allowed that arts and cultural organizations are currently struggling and have been very hard hit during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is understood that environmental stewardship is not necessarily top of mind for them. For the long-term, however, the focus will be on how the planning effort can support their economic recovery. By listening to the science and taking appropriate actions, the impacts of both Covid-19 and climate change can be reduced.

Chair Malkin asked how the Commission would go about submitting ideas and proposals for the process. Ms. Ewing said she would be happy to capture any feedback during the meeting as well as offline. Specific ways the Commission may play a role in implementing the plan have not been determined.

Arts Community Manager Scott MacDonald added the issue could be made a part of the Cultural Compass update. He said he had received a comment from Councilmember Stokes which reiterated his desire to encourage actions relative to environmental stewardship.

With regard to how the notion of a sustainable district might fold into the art district, Chair Malkin pointed out that eco-art is an genre that is happening around the country. He said any proposal for the art district should be looked at through the lens of eco-art, which can be widely defined as being environmentally centric. It includes the notion of doing no harm to the environment in the creation of art. The Cultural Compass should include a footnote indicating the Commission is inclined to look favorably on eco-art. Artists could be encouraged or directed to provide environmental impact statements as part of the grants process.

Commissioner Lewis asked if other cities ask artists to submit an environmental impact statement. Mr. MacDonald said he was not aware of any cities mandating such a submittal for public art projects. He pointed out, however, environmental impacts come up during the permitting process. Some programs, such as percent for art programs, are tied to certain types of capital projects that often are focused on environmental or ecological awareness. He said there is also the imperative of supporting a diverse community and highlighted the need to strike a balance.

Commissioner Gulati pointed out that there are many artists who work with recycled materials.

Commissioner Lau Hui suggested the environmental stewardship notion could be folded into the Bellwether project. One component of the exhibition could center on environmental art and be made an annual element. She also asked if the various boards and commissions will be allowed to review the final draft actions and offer comments to enhance them before they are presented to the City Council for approval. Ms. Ewing said the intent was to review the package with the boards and commissions and to seek their input. Once the draft plan is released, the Commission could offer comments and any new specific ideas to be flushed out and built on going forward.

Chair Malkin asked how an arts group would go about taking advantage of energy efficiency programs, and if there is a central location within the city groups can be pointed to for energy consultations. Ms. Ewing said most energy incentives are provided through Puget Sound Energy, though the city does assist people and businesses by pointing them in the right direction. Chair Malkin suggested something could be added to the city's website the Commission could point arts organizations to. Mr. MacDonald said that would be reasonable.

Chair Malkin also suggested encouraging arts groups to post the bus lines or light rail to take to get to their facilities. Ms. Ewing said that would be a good thing.

Chair Malkin said the Power Up program, which is focused on capacity building, could fit into the larger scheme of things. Ms. Ewing agreed and pointed out that on the environmental side there are a couple of burgeoning groups in the city that are moving toward becoming non-profits. The city wants to help them build capacity as well. There are also some partners, such as Hopelink, that provide some energy efficiency services, and those programs could be

grown as well through capacity building. Mr. MacDonald noted that for 2020 the Power Up program is focused on resiliency. There could be some lessons learned from it on the broader topic of resiliency and planning for the future that would not necessarily be specific to arts organizations.

Commissioner Gulati asked if there been any check-in with parks and recreation about eco-friendly programs. Ms. Ewing said she has been working closely with that department on the plan update. Much is already being done in the city's park network to advance sustainability, but there may be additional opportunities.

Chair Malkin said he was aware that the Bellevue Arts Museum several years ago received a grant for its energy efficiency program. Puget Sound Energy is very active in pursuing those kinds of things. The available opportunities need to be brought to the attention of arts groups, particularly those with facilities. Ms. Ewing said there are opportunities around community solar in which Puget Sound Energy enters into leases for the use of building roofs where they install solar panels. City Hall is currently looking at that option.

Chair Malkin asked Ms. Ewing if her group could sponsor a marketing campaign for electric vehicles and recruit visual artists to do things like designing branding wraps for electric vehicles or buses. Mr. MacDonald said that would be a good idea. Ms. Ewing agreed and said it could apply to city-owned electric vehicles and the electric vehicle charging stations.

B. Arts Audience Participation Survey

Arts Program Assistant Manette Stamm reminded the Commissioners that the survey was launched in June and the 1074 responses were collected through July 17. Eight different languages were used, and all but one were utilized. In general, the respondents are active and interested in the arts. Most were older but they live all across the Eastside, mostly in Bellevue. Bellevue was shown to be a very clear destination for arts and culture and educational experiences. The survey results indicate that Seattle residents who work on the Eastside represent an opportunity for Eastside organizations to grow their audience.

Mr. MacDonald said he viewed the fact that 38.4 percent of the respondents live in Bellevue as a success toward getting a fuller vision of the Eastside. If only Bellevue residents had responded to the survey, the picture would not be as complete. He added that there are no real barriers on the Eastside in terms of how people live; they routinely shop and conduct business in the various cities, and Bellevue was highlighted in the survey as a destination for the arts.

Ms. Stamm noted that 67 percent of the respondents were age 45 or older, with 45 percent being 55 or older. The most underrepresented demographic groups were those 34 years old and younger. The survey included educational experience as well as arts and cultural experiences, which on the Eastside are predominantly oriented toward younger participants. While the survey did not capture a complete picture of the total population, it does indicate that a rather large percentage of older audiences are participating in the arts.

Chair Malkin asked if the survey answers could be cross-referenced with the work being done by the Bellevue Downtown Association to survey downtown residents. He said it would be interesting to know if where Bellevue residents live influences how they participate in arts and culture events. Ms. Stamm said she would give that some consideration.

Mr. MacDonald said going forward it will be interesting to break down the responses by age. He noted that the respondents under the age of 34 totaled more than 130, which is significant. In any planning effort, getting 30 people at an open house, let alone 30 people commenting, is considered a decent response.

Chair Malkin said he read the data as being encouraging in that it indicated the respondents during normal times attend art fairs and festivals.

Ms. Stamm said it is noteworthy that the survey results showed Bellevue to be a clear destination on the Eastside for arts and cultural experiences, outpacing even Seattle. The respondents were able to check multiple cities in answering the question about where they attend arts, cultural or education experiences, and the top answers were Bellevue, Seattle, Kirkland and Redmond.

The survey asked what it would take to make the respondents feel comfortable in returning to in-person events. In general, most indicated they wanted to see additional precautions such as masks and hand sanitizer along with social distancing, disinfecting spaces, and having a Covid-19 vaccine. Twelve percent of the respondents indicated they would prefer virtual events, while five percent said they needed no precautions at all.

Mr. MacDonald noted that collectively, 95 percent of the respondents indicated a desire to see some precautions taken when the Governor gives the all clear. He said it was interesting to hear things like people wanting very specific types of filters in HVAC systems, and about the gaps between performances being longer. It all translates into a lot of challenges for arts organizations, particularly those operating and hold events in space.

Ms. Stamm said the survey included a question that centered on the number of persons attending events, increasing from 25 to 100 to 250. Not all respondents felt the larger the gathering the less likely it would be they would attend. The responses to “I don’t think I will go back” and “Don’t know” increased as the gathering size increased, though the respondents indicated they were most likely to attend events with gathering sizes of 250, which was not expected. It is clear that a lot of people still do not know when they will choose to once again attend events.

The Commissioners were told the questions in Part III of the survey were more qualitative. Ms. Stamm said the hundred pages or so of responses are still being reviewed. The questions asked about kinds of alternative experiences and interactions with the arts during the shutdown, if there were any limits to virtual participation, and what the audience liked or did not like about virtual experiences offered. More than half of the respondents indicated they had attended at least one unpaid virtual experience, and more unpaid virtual experiences are attended than paid virtual experiences. The most popular types of virtual experiences the respondents reported attending were workshops and classes, followed by celebrations and tours. The survey asked how likely respondents would be to return if an event were held outdoors with social distancing practiced, something not currently allowed under the Governor’s order, and 74 of the respondents indicated they were likely or somewhat likely to attend such an event.

The question regarding the impact or lack of impact the arts have had on lives during the pandemic generated the most responses among the qualitative questions. Many mentioned despair and depression arising from a lack of socialization at events and not being able to directly participate in the arts. There were some who felt more inspired and thankful for virtual experiences, but most indicated they are missing the arts and are really feeling it.

Ms. Stamm said the next step will be to draft an executive summary. It will include an attachment with all of the results, graphs and accompanying explanations of the data. It will be finalized by the end of August and will be available to the public.

Commissioner Lewis said the information is good to have during a period of time when no one knows quite what to do.

C. Economic Development Plan – Creative Economy

Economic Development Manager Philly Marsh said the work to update the Economic Development Plan has been under way for about a year following the Council approving the objectives for the update. The plan was last updated in 2014 and since then much has changed, including the fact that the cultural arts program was incorporated into the economic development division. The plan is intended to be a five-year plan, though changing it to a chapter-based plan will make it more nimble and easier to update.

The eight objectives approved by the Council in July 2019 were 1) identify ways to support the creative economy; 2) explore new opportunities to support small business; 3) support more robust retail activity; 4) identify best practices for integrating new businesses into the community; 5) support capacity building for community groups; 6) integrate key recommendations from the Tourism Plan; 7) make the plan easier to update; and 8) support local workforce development options and programs.

Ms. Marsh said Avalanche Consulting was contracted to assist in updating the plan. The firm was subsequently was acquired by EY US but has continued to focus on the objectives and the data from previous studies, including the Bel-Red arts district work, the Creative Edge, the Cultural Compass, and from extensive stakeholder outreach. At a focus group in December 2019 attention was given to the needs and opportunities, and at a second focus group in January the work zeroed in on strategies to be considered. Ultimately, the creative strategies in the updated plan will serve as a companion document to the Cultural Compass.

From the planning effort, the objectives, the stakeholder engagement, research and data analysis, six focus areas have been identified: 1) capacity building and partnerships; 2) small business and entrepreneurship; 3) workforce; 4) retail; 5) creative economy; and 6) tourism. The direct strategies complement some foundational strategies that are more applicable to a citywide approach.

Ms. Marsh allowed that the Commission is well aware of the need for a creative economy and benefits and values it brings to the city. It creates vibrancy, interest, and activities for residents, employees and tourists. One thing focused on in the current planning effort is the difference between the digital creative economy versus the traditional creative economy.

The draft plan was slated to be brought before the Council for adoption on March 23. The Covid-19 pandemic triggered a need for the economic development division to make a turn toward being responsive to the immediate needs of businesses and organizations. In June the Council asked the division to reengage with the Economic Development Plan and to test drive the strategies and tactics in the plan in light of the Covid-19 impacts. Some things were clear from the start, including the fact that the social distancing guidelines made it impossible for creative organizations to function. That has had a huge impact on arts organizations and tourism. The city's tourism sector dropped 90 percent in terms of hotel occupancy and remains highly impacted. The arts audience participation survey results points out the need to be cognizant of the environment and to be able to stay nimble in addressing the needs of both the creative economy and the arts.

Ms. Marsh said the work of Mr. MacDonald and Ms. Stamm helped to make headway relative to the development of some of the strategies, especially around capacity building. They set up meetings with Eastside city art administrators to share information, make sure efforts were not

being duplicated, and working together to do more with less. They co-lead a new Eastside arts organization, and they expanded existing programming to focus on pandemic recovery.

Ms. Marsh said when the economic development division was asked to reengage with the Economic Development Plan, the consultant's new home with EY US afforded them a much larger dataset and wealth of knowledge from around the world relative to how the pandemic was effecting economies. The need to be nimble and to adapt to immediate needs underlies the high-level policy strategies. The consultant has found that great disruptions like pandemics do not create new challenges, they emphasize the things that already exist.

The fact that Bellevue had already done planning work put the city in a unique position to identify the needs and the opportunities. In making test runs, the strategies were not changed, though some strategies were revised based on things learned over the past few months. One of the strategies is to enhance Bellevue's leading position in the digital creative sector and encourage linkages with the traditional creative sector where possible. Another strategy is to focus on how to expand the audiences for Bellevue's multicultural organizations and what they offer. Focus has also been given to the Bel-Red arts district and developing the built and institutional infrastructure needed to position the district as a major destination. That will require establishing a working group to convene, foster and promote the district. On the planning side, consideration will be given to ways to incentivize art uses for new development in Bel-Red.

The initial focus will be on recovering from the pandemic. Once the economy begins to rebound, there will be a pivot to strategies that can only be realized when it is known what the new normal will be. It will be important to expand and promote festivals, events and activities to grow the creative economy sector and to promote a strong creative brand for Bellevue, something that cannot be done during a time of social distancing.

Ms. Marsh asked the Commissioners to identify what success should look like, and what role the Commission should play in helping to implement the strategies.

Chair Malkin asked if other cities are being used as a model in terms of integrating the digital and traditional creative economies. Ms. Marsh said there are benchmarks to follow from cities such as Boulder, Colorado, Santa Monica and Sunnyvale, California, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Arlington County, Virginia. There is a mix of the digital and traditional creative communities across them all. Bellevue's divides between the digital and the traditional is one of the biggest ones out there.

Chair Malkin asked what lessons have been learned. Ms. Marsh said one lesson learned has been around the clear need to convene the digital sector, which as a tech sector does not always see itself as a creative sector. The work will require some relationship building and some activation, possibly through competitions. Mr. MacDonald added that the list of things that would be good to do should include identifying opportunities within existing programs to pair creative tech workers with artists to see what collaboration they could come up with. The Creative Edge to a large degree seeks to find the overlap between those worlds while continuing to support the traditional art forms.

Chair Malkin asked if the definition of culture to include the creative digital economy. Mr. MacDonald said that could be talked about as part of the Cultural Compass.

Commissioner Gulati pointed out that there had been talk about doing a series of digital projections on downtown buildings. Mr. MacDonald said that was part of Bellwether, though he stressed that it would not involve pairing of digital and traditional artists. It will serve, however, as a fledgling tryout for a more robust collaboration program as part of a future

Bellwether. The beauty of Bellwether is that such collaborations can be tried. There should be a clear vision for where there needs to be differentiation between the various sectors, but there should also be attention given to joining forces to reach the creative potential.

Commissioner Lau Hui commented that the digital technology sector in Bellevue is strong and does not need financial support from the city to strengthen their position in the creative economy. What needs to be done is to bring the rest of the grassroots organizations up to par by strengthening their capacity building. During the pandemic, arts organizations have lost more workers than any other sector, and the city needs to ensure those smaller organizations will have the capacity to move forward. The gap between the digital and traditional sectors should not be allowed to expand.

Mr. MacDonald said he received a note from Councilmember Stokes calling for encouraging the inclusion of affordable housing and work spaces for artists. He said there needs to be a strong base, which is the small arts organizations and the individual artists. In terms of financial support, it is true the city does not need to be throwing grant dollars toward tech employees. It is equally true that tech companies often look for unique opportunities to work with artists, and when that is done they bring a number of resources to an opportunity.

Chair Malkin said a precedent was set by giving a grant to Jen Tremblay who did a VR project at the Botanical Gardens. He said there are several area VR companies who likely would be open to partnering with the traditional art sectors. It is just a matter of being more cognizant of integrating the digital sector with the traditional sector. Moving forward with the arts space initiative should take into consideration the digital economy as well as the traditional economy as an overall umbrella reflecting the creative economy.

Ms. Marsh said the full draft of the plan will be presented to the Council on September 14. She said the Council saw the strategies and the recovery tactics in early July. Adoption will occur before the end of the year. Mr. MacDonald said the timing of the Commission's next meeting on September 8 will not allow for additional review by the Commission.

Chair Malkin asked if a Commissioner could be assigned to the working group. Ms. Marsh said that would in fact be helpful.

With regard to what success will look like, Chair Malkin suggested it will entail having a very visible technology element to Bellwether. Erasing the line between the digital and the traditional creative economies will be a success.

Commissioner Gulati suggested success will involve being eco-friendly, such as using technology instead of fireworks on the Fourth of July. Mr. MacDonald agreed there is an opportunity for the creative tech and the creative arts worlds to come together. The coming together will resonate a powerful message. He added that plans are in the works to do some sort of lighting display at midnight on New Year's Eve as part of Bellwether.

5. COMMISSION QUICK BUSINESS – None

6. REPORTS

A. Commissioners' Committee and Lead Reports – As noted

B. Project Updates from Staff

Mr. MacDonald said the original idea behind the Old Business support concept got shrunk to something that would allow two-way directional traffic to continue. The mural will not be a part of the project.

Mr. MacDonald said he recognized that the Commission would like to keep the discussion alive around possible artist affordable housing or spaces. To that end staff are working on an NEA Our Town grant under the heading of Bel-Red arts district planning. If funded, it will include the final two stages of the arts space feasibility study. A number of community arts organizations that work on the Eastside or are located in Bel-Red are being signed up as part of the application.

The Commissioners were informed that some organizations will not be using their grant money. Traditionally funds not used simply go away, but there is the potential for having a proposal brought to the table for how to reallocate the funding instead for a project occurring in 2020.

A final agenda for the Power Up program is being developed. It will be brought back before the Commission in September.

With regard to the 130th public art project, Mr. MacDonald said the artist has developed a new form for the work. That will be brought back to the Commission when there is time on the agenda. Work to get a fabrication contract signed for the Downtown Park work is ongoing and is set to be approved by the Council on September 8. The Lattawood Park project is under construction. All of the conduit for the electrical has been laid and work on the artwork foundations is set to begin in about a week, with placement of the artwork occurring within the month of August. Staff are also working to obtain quotes for the renovation work on the two works previously discussed by the Commission.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Malkin adjourned the meeting at 6:32 p.m.