BELLEVUE ARTS COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

October 27, 2020

4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Virtual Meeting

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Malkin, Commissioners Gowdy, Gulati,

Lau Hui, Martinez, Wolfteich

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Aldredge

STAFF PRESENT: Scott MacDonald, Manette Stamm, Department of

Planning and Community Development

OTHERS PRESENT: Ben Beres, SuttonBeresCuller

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:32 p.m. by Chair Malkin who presided. All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Aldredge who was excused.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES.

A. Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Lau Hui. The motion was seconded was by Commissioner Wolfteich and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the September 1, 2020, minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Wolfteich. The motion was seconded was by Commissioner Gulati and the motion carried unanimously.

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. ACTION ITEMS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

Chair Malkin welcomed new Commissioner Gowdy and asked her to introduce herself. Commissioner Gowdy said she has been an interior designer for more than 50 years and has been fortunate enough to have clients with budgets big enough to afford hiring architects and designers and to purchase art and custom rugs. She said through it all she has felt an obligation to use some of her talents developed through those paths to help the general public. Art benefits everyone. She said she served on the board of Imagine Housing for nine years and participated in the planning of properties. For the most recently Imagine Housing project on Bellevue Way, the budget allowed for the purchase of 13 pieces of original artwork to hang throughout the building, allowing those living in affordable housing to benefit from good artwork. She said she also serves on the board of Eastside Baby Corner.

A. Bellwether 2020 Update

Arts Community Manager Scott MacDonald said Bellwether started as the Bellevue Sculpture Exhibition in 1992. It was then a biennial event that was almost exclusively an exhibition of already made works submitted by artists and reviewed and selected by a panel. In 2012 the exhibition expanded to include one or two works made specifically for the show. The exhibition was refocused and reimagined in 2017 as part of the Grand Connection work to develop the framework plan. It was condensed into a ten-day show featuring multimedia works, and the exhibition was rebranded as Bellwether. The artist collective SuttenBeresCuller was brought on board for the Grand Connection planning work and has continued on as the creative directors for Bellwether. In 2018 SuttonBeresCuller served as the chief curator and the new multimedia event featured some 50 artists, and the works were more focused on emerging contemporary artists within the region and nationally. That change was made in part to respond to where art is going generally, which is more time-based and more experiential rather than static sculptures. The new format has also opened the doors to focusing on partnerships. The 2018 event took over almost all of the Bellevue Arts Museum and included the locating of art at a number of private venues. In 2019 the show expanded its list of partners to include the Meydenbauer Center as a key site along with the Bellevue Arts Museum and City Hall.

Mr. MacDonald said Bellwether is working to reinforce Bellevue's creative and cultural identity. That can be seen in the diversity of the participating artists. In 2016 roughly 20 percent of the Bellwether artists were part of diverse groups; in 2018 that number rose to 35 percent, and in 2019 it was up to 65 percent. Adding in all of the speakers and panel experiences, the number was closer to 80 or 90 percent. The format change from a show lasting four months and featuring static works to a show lasting ten days featuring art and events has resulted in a dramatic increase in attendance. The opening event itself has seen upwards of a 400 percent increase. In 2019 there were 21 events over the ten days.

In February 2020 everyone was in full swing planning for the next version of Bellwether featuring works and events are various sites, including new sites. Then in March Covid-19 came along and disrupted everything. By May the decision was made to look at creating a different format for Bellwether, one that would survive having even the tightest restrictions in place. The new show shifted from its normal time, the second week of September, to start in December, and it has been extended to allow more time for people to participate without having to gather in groups or touch things. The decision was made to focus the show on digital artwork. All of the art will be made available both in person and online so people can decide how they want to engage. Much is being learned about what should be carried forward even post Covid-19. The expansion of the online content is one such area. Arts organizations who started putting their art content online have found their reach extended, both locally, across the nation and worldwide.

Mr. Ben Beres with SuttonBeresCuller said much of the planning work done for the 2020 exhibition has been moved down the line to 2021. In effect, planning for two Bellwether events has been occurring at the same time. Originally it was thought that digital projects would occur throughout the city featuring the theme of growth, hope, survival and return. Bellwether has always been celebratory in nature and has always highlighted the works of regional artists. At the heart of Bellwether is the importance of commissioning new works. There are 12 visual and video artworks are lined up, and agreements were just recently approved with the Bellevue Arts Museum to put everything on their building and in their building. There will be projections on the interior, from the exterior to a couple of places,

and there will be monitors facing out toward the street and inward in the lobby. One of the drawbacks is that the projections will only happen when it is dark. Having the Bellevue Arts Museum as a venue is very good. Three separate dance videos were filmed a couple of months ago with a full production team in the Botanical Garden, at the Bellevue Arts Museum and at Downtown Park. Each is 10 to 15 minutes long and highlights the beauty of Bellevue. The approach may be an avenue to follow in the future as well. Work is underway with some of the towers in the Downtown to include a lighting component.

Mr. Beres said there is already much planned for 2021. A curator by the name of Magan Stelljes is on board. She is a glass artist has an incredible network that will bring in artists from all over. Also on board is Priscilla Dober whose works are very interactive. Additional community oriented artists are under consideration. More online works will also be in the mix. The hope is the event will be held again in September.

Mr. MacDonald said the lessons learned in 2020 will be applied in 2021 to make the event even bigger. Bellevue's big connection between tech and art is a great area for the show to continue to explore. The films mentioned by Mr. Beres are going to be absolutely beautiful and they will serve as a way of showcasing both artists in different parts of Bellevue and different areas of the city. They will be great for the community and will serve as fertile ground for the arts in the city.

Chair Malkin asked if it was safe to assume there would be some analytics for the online experience so it can be known how big the audience is and where it is coming from. Mr. MacDonald said the videos and digital works will be hosted on the website and on Vimeo. That usually comes with a variety of analytics. In past Bellwether exhibitions, measures could only be taken of the major events within enclosed spaces. Other arts organizations are seeing their online events gain up to three times the normal number of views over inperson events. Some organizations are even seeing up to 100 times the viewership.

Mr. Beres said the video production company, Frontrunner Films, has done a great job. He said he was anxious to produce additional films in other areas of the city, including the Wilburton Trestle and the new Meydenbauer Bay Park. In many ways the videos will serve as digital postcards for the city.

Chair Malkin asked about the number of Eastside artists included in Bellwether both for 2020 and 2021. Mr. Beres said more will be involved in 2021. For 2020 one of the main artists is Maha Petric, whose works will be projected onto the front of the Bellevue Arts Museum on Bellevue Way. Also on board is Humaira Abid, an Eastside artist. Chair Malkin pointed out one argument of the Commission in past years has been that the featured artists were predominantly from Seattle and other areas rather than from the Eastside. He said it was good to see a pivot in the direction of using local artists.

Chair Malkin asked if the three films will continue beyond just the dates of the festival. Mr. Beres said the online components will be available in perpetuity. Mr. MacDonald added that the city will own the rights to use the films for as long as it wants, and not just on the Bellwether site. The videos will be highly crafted works.

Commissioner Lau Hui asked if a Bellwether launch party is being planned. Mr. MacDonald said there are no such plans currently. Chair Malkin suggested something could be done virtually. Mr. MacDonald said he would talk about that with the team and circle back to the Commission. Mr. Beres added that the museum does not want to host an opening event because of their capacity limits, but the event itself will be advertised well in advance, including the opening weekend.

B. Grant Allocations

Arts Program Assistant Mannette Stamm said the grants program has been around since 2001, though initially it had a different format. It is now bigger and better and there are three different granting programs: the Eastside Arts Partnerships, PowerUp and special projects grants. The Allocations Committee consisted of four reviewers, Commissioners Lau Hui and Wolfteich representing the Commission, and two outside arts professionals. The budget for 2020 matches the budget for 2019. The recommendation of the Allocations Committee is to fund all 42 applicants for a total allocation of \$112,550 for the Eastside Arts Partnerships, specifically 32 non-profit organizations; \$17,450 to six individuals and four non-profits for special projects grants; and \$15,000 for three different organizations with PowerUp grants.

The Eastside Arts Partnerships program provides operating support to non-profits working in Bellevue that provide annual arts, culture and heritage programs. Two different programs within the Eastside Arts Partnerships provide two different levels of funding. The first is for larger non-profits and has a limit of \$10,000, while the other is for smaller organizations that are primarily run by volunteers and has a limit of \$5000.

The Allocations Committee reviewed 32 applications and considered creative engagement, public access and benefit for Bellevue residents, and the organizational capacity and sustainability of the applicant. The total funds requested were \$210,211. In all, 29 organizations applied, all of three of which were funded in previous years. The average award for each kind of Eastside Arts Partnerships grant is \$3517, or about 54 percent of the average request. The average for the Pro Partner program is \$5552, while the average for the Community Partners program is \$1935.

The PowerUp program is aimed at helping leaders of arts and culture non-profits reach the next level in their organizational development. The funds can be used for such things as board development, capacity building and improving technologies. The criteria utilized by the Allocations Committee were readiness to engage in capacity building, a clearly articulated need and project feasibility, and level of commitment to capacity building. There were five applications submitted for a total funding request of \$25,000. The Committee recommended funding three of the five applications for a total of \$15,000, with each award being \$5000. Organizations that receive PowerUp grants become part of a cohort that conducts different workshops. That element of the program for this year was opened to any Eastside organization and three virtual workshops were conducted.

The goals for the special projects program are to foster creativity and innovation, and to increase access to art, culture and heritage. The grants are primarily awarded to artists and individuals for specific projects. Applicants can apply once and they can be renewed once after receiving a grant for a project. Ten applications were submitted totaling \$35,500. The applicant pool included one renewal and nine new special project applications. The Committee recommended funding all of the applications with an average award of \$1745, or about 38 percent of the average request.

Commissioner Lau Hui said she saw a lot of improvements made in the allocations process. She said her first time serving on the Allocations Committee was several years ago involving all paper applications. That has now transitioned to all online applications, which is much easier and more efficient. Staff did an excellent job of doing the tabulations and setting up the evaluation work and the streamlined approach is far more efficient. With regard to the applicants, she said they have also evolved to be more self-sustaining.

Commissioner Wolfteich said the special projects portion of the allocation process could be improved. The applicants were given a suggested limit of \$3000. The Eastside Arts Partnerships has a limit of \$10,000 for Eastside Arts Partnerships Pro Partners and \$5000 for Eastside Arts Partnerships Community Partners. The special projects applicants should be given a \$3000 maximum. There is a limited amount of money available for special projects and the applicants were all over the map in terms of heading the funding guidelines, with some requesting as much as \$10,000. Others stayed within the \$3000 guideline, and that created a certain inequity. Those who did not adhere to the guidelines often were rewarded with more money because their request was higher.

Mr. MacDonald allowed that the suggestion was a good one and agreed it should be considered next time around. The Allocations Committee will also continue to look at diversity, equity and inclusion in reviewing and promoting the grants.

Commissioner Wolfteich stated that overall the process was very good. He thanked the staff for all their diligent work ahead of the Allocations Committee meeting.

Chair Malkin asked what the thinking was behind giving the Kirkland Arts Center some funding. Commissioner Wolfteich said he was not full onboard with funding that application, but there was support from the other panelists. The Kirkland Arts Center is a great organization but they do not operate in Bellevue per se. There are plenty of other Eastside organizations that offer classes that are attended by Bellevue residents and under that argument any organization in the Seattle area could be funded if Bellevue residents are involved.

Mr. MacDonald said he understood the notion of wanting to support organizations that are specifically based in Bellevue. However, the program is also aimed at supporting audiences. A big part of the audience for the Kirkland Arts Center are Bellevue based. Their application was specific to reducing fees for Bellevue residents. Any organization can apply, but they must demonstrate a benefit for Bellevue. The panel concluded that the Kirkland Arts Center application succeeded in that regard.

Commissioner Wolfteich said he shared his opinion with the panel and in the ensuring discussion the amount awarded to Kirkland Arts Center was reduced. A requirement to simply indicate a program serves Bellevue residents can open the door to a lot of organizations to apply for limited funds.

Commissioner Gowdy asked how organizations know to apply for funding from the program, noting that many of the organizations on the list have been previously funded. Ms. Stamm allowed that the program does fund a lot of organizations year in and year out. She said staff works with a consultant to conduct outreach in the Bellevue community. They include outreach in languages other than English. The program is also promoted via the city's communications team through social media. Mr. MacDonald commented that in 2014 the organizations that applied mirrored those that applied the year before. There was not a lot of targeted outreach done, particularly to diverse organizations, in those years and even following them. Since then the makeup of the pool of applicants has expanded from about 20 organizations to over 40. There are other organizations out there, and other artists, that could be applying for special projects funding.

Commissioner Martinez asked what the special projects proposals typically look like. Ms. Stamm said many of the grants, not just special projects, are event based, which of course will make things interesting for the coming year. A number of the special projects applications for 2021 involve virtual productions. Commissioner Wolfteich added that

there was quite a range evidenced in the applications, with some proposals being very detailed, and others evoking little more than an idea with less supporting groundwork. The Committee chose to reward those with more detailed explanations and timelines.

Chair Malkin said the years past the Commission has funded specific art projects. In 2019 a VR collaboration at the Bellevue Botanical Gardens was one such project. There are special projects that go beyond just performances.

Commissioner Martinez noted that on average recipients were awarded only about 38 percent of their requests and asked if the applicant must come up with the balance of the funding elsewhere. Ms. Stamm said applicants are cautioned against relying fully on grant funding. The Allocations Committee in fact looks at that issue in determining whether or not to fund an application. Applications with diverse funding plans are viewed more favorably.

Commissioner Gulati said it is questionable when an applicant says a project will cost \$15,000, is only asking for \$5000, and provides no narrative around where they will find the balance.

Ms. Stamm clarified that the grants program works on a reimbursement basis. Even if a project is awarded funding, if the work is not completed the funds are not allocated. At the end of the year, grantees are required to submit a report outlining who they served, how they were served, how they were able to execute the scope of work, and the degree of success they achieved. Only then are they allocated the funds awarded to them. Mr. MacDonald added that it is rare for a grantee to decide not to do their project at all and just walk away from the money. He said he has only seen that happen once or twice, and usually it involved an individual artist who decided not to move ahead with their proposal. Organizations are pretty good about getting projects done.

Commissioner Wolfteich said the Covid-19 situation has certainly added challenges that could lead to a higher proportion of organizations unable to pull off their proposals. Some of the planned events are for in-person experiences but they include an online contingency. Some organizations did not indicate any logistics for an online event, and that could mean there will be a higher incidence of events not going forward.

Mr. MacDonald informed the Commissioners that the city received some CARES Act funding. A total of 37 \$5000 grants were awarded to businesses, with 13 of them going specifically to arts and cultural non-profits, totaling about 50 percent of the total grants program. Additionally, October 26 was a deadline for another grant for up to \$25,000 for arts and cultural organizations that support either non-profits or artists as sole proprietor business owners.

A motion to approve the grant allocations as recommended by the Allocations Committee was made by Commissioner Gowdy. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gulati and the motion carried unanimously.

C. Arts Audience Survey Report

Mr. MacDonald stated that early in the pandemic it was known that there would be some huge hits to the arts and cultural community. Staff met with more than 25 arts and cultural organizations that work in Bellevue, though they were not necessarily all located in Bellevue, to talk about their challenges and financial impacts. Many organizations were hoping to hold their summertime camps, which are big revenue generators. That was in March and April, and admittedly much has changed since, but it was clear early on that

there would be financial impacts. Like many other cities, Bellevue did not have access to additional funds and the focus was on finding ways to help arts organizations and artists without trying to come up with new dollars. The city hired a consultant to provide technical assistance to organizations applying for Paycheck Protection Program loans, and information sharing about grants and additional funding sources. The portable art collection call was changed from two purchases from major artists to 20 artworks in order to help as many artists as possible, particularly emerging artists.

Mr. MacDonald said the arts survey was seen as an opportunity to help organizations by gathering data from their audiences. It was heard from the earlier conversations that many of the smaller organizations do not have the capacity to talk to their communities, in large part because the smaller organizations had to immediately let people go. The survey was seen as an opportunity to learn from the experiences of the different organizations about virtual content and innovative ways to reach audiences, and about barriers to participation. The survey was offered in eight different languages as one way of making it as welcoming as possible. Staff worked with organizations to craft the questions and to determine in which languages the survey should be offered.

There were 1074 responses to the survey across all of the languages. A partnership approach was taken with Issaquah, Redmond, Renton and Kirkland on the strength of the argument that from an audience perspective there is no distinction between an organization working in Bellevue and an organization working across a border given the fluidity of the communities. The Eastside Arts and Cultural Coalition played a big role in reviewing the survey questions. The respondents to the survey were not all from Bellevue so the results offer a broader view of the Eastside arts community.

Chair Malkin asked if the "other cities" reference included other cities in the Puget Sound region, such as the San Juan islands. Mr. MacDonald said it more refers to cities like Covington, Milton or Enumclaw. The number of responses from those outlying areas was quite small.

Mr. MacDonald stressed the importance of recognizing from the survey results that nearly every city punched above its weight in terms of the percent of residents attending events. For instance, Woodinville had only 1.7 percent of the survey respondents, yet 18 percent of the respondents overall reported attending events in Woodinville. For many of the cities, as much as five times the number of respondents from their jurisdictions indicated they attend events in those jurisdictions. That certainly was true for Bellevue where 38 percent of the respondents live in Bellevue, while 82 percent reported attending events in Bellevue. That is a clear indication that Bellevue is the heart of the arts and cultural world on the Eastside. Bellevue event beat Seattle among the respondents, which was not expected.

Forty-four of the survey respondents were 55 years old and over. The percentage of Bellevue's population in that age group is only 23 percent. Data from various arts organizations shows that those participating in the offerings of arts and cultural organizations are either very young and older, so clearly the survey missed capturing input from those in the younger demographics. Even so, the responses were telling in terms of issues of safety and Covid-19 precautions different populations want.

The major take away from the question related to the type of arts and cultural experiences people are attending was that theater and music were by far the top responses. For those respondents in the younger demographic categories, it was dance and theatre that stood out. For those in the 25 to 44 age groups, the indication was they

attend events less and favor festivals more, which generally are events that are easier to take kids to.

The question asking how often the respondents attended an arts, cultural or education experience within the last year, 55 percent indicated attending events at least weekly or monthly. Mr. MacDonald stressed that the survey was released just a couple of months into the pandemic and that the answers might have been different further into the pandemic. The survey results showed a clear correlation between the number of respondents that have subscriptions and memberships and how often they attend art events. The question of whether or not the subscription or membership model is the best approach is something arts organizations often debate. He allowed that those who responded to the survey are part of a very active arts audience. Only one percent of the respondents indicated not attending events yearly. Fifty-four percent of the survey respondents reported having season tickets or memberships.

With regard to the types of accommodations required before attending arts and cultural events once events are allowed, 57 percent indicated a desire to have a readily available vaccine. That is a huge factor to consider, especially for performing arts organizations. Not only is it necessary to have a vaccine available, there must be the perception that it is readily available and that its use is widespread. Things like mandatory face coverings were not in place at the time of the survey, nor were social distancing, the use of hand sanitizers and disinfecting indoor spaces, all of which are now part of all organizations current reopening plans. For thing like theater productions and dance performances, it is simply not economically viable to accommodate social distancing because it limits the number of seats that can be filled.

The questions addressing the size of events people might feel comfortable attending, 25 or less, 100 and 250 or more, were aimed at determining if there was a difference in the perception. The biggest take away was that the bigger the event, the more people were unsure about attending. There were no big differences in the responses based on age or memberships or season ticket holders. Clearly people are more comfortable with smaller events.

Mr. MacDonald allowed that the question asking if respondents had since March participated in any paid or unpaid program was confusing. The question did unveil the fact that 33 percent of the respondents had paid for a virtual event, a disproportionate amount of which are membership and season ticket holders. There appears to be an opportunity for arts and cultural organizations to gear content toward that population to try to increase revenues. The younger audiences paying for virtual events were largely taking classes.

Mr. MacDonald said the fill-in-the-blank questions were the most interesting and fruitful. They served as an opportunity for the community to share their direct thoughts and experiences. The vast majority of the respondents answering the question about what limited their virtual participation indicated no limits. For others, the speed, availability, reliability of internet connections, along with sound quality, was a big issue, particularly for those wanting to take music classes or see a musical performance. Some were not patient enough with having connectivity issues. Others indicated a desire to find a list of what is available relative to virtual events. Some suggested that for them the virtual experience was not worth the cost, though many arts organizations are offering virtual events for free; for those who do charge, the fee is around a third of the original in-person cost. Some expressed concern about being hacked while participating in a virtual program, while others indicated being unemployed or on a limited income kept them from participating.

The responses to the question regarding the types of arts, cultural and educational experiences attended virtually showed that performances and workshops or classes are the two main types of events. Other themes included book clubs, art demonstrations on Instagram, group practices, readings, artist talks, critiques, museum talks and panel discussions. Seventy-six percent of respondents under the age of 18 reported having attended an event or workshop. The open-ended question about what the respondents like or enjoy about virtual arts experiences generated comments about convenience and accessibility, not having to travel, park or pay for toll fees, reduced cost, and parents having better access due to not having to get a sitter.

In terms of equity and inclusion, Mr. MacDonald allowed that there certainly are barriers to the virtual environment. In general, however, the respondents did not talk much about technical or financial barriers to attending events, rather they talked more about benefits to accessibility. Every organization, every building and every in-person event has coded design into it that makes people feel like something is or is not for them. It can take the form of how people dress, or if they look like the rest of the audience. Virtual events offer the opportunity to break down some of those barriers and give people the opportunity to feel welcome exploring new things.

To the question asked about events offered outdoors with proper social distancing, the responses were generally favorable. People are interested in seeing things in person under those strictures. Even in the 65 and older demographic, 85 percent indicated they were either somewhat or highly likely to attend such an event.

The question regarding how the arts or the lack thereof has impacted the respondents during the pandemic generated widely ranging and very honest responses. While some of the answers given were heartbreaking and sad, there was also a lot of hope expressed. Many expressed a sense of loss from the lack of arts; others missed the communities they had previously connected with via arts and cultural offerings. There were a number of artists or professionals working at arts organizations who had been made unemployed by the pandemic. Artist incomes have dropped, and it is harder to support local artists. Many said they were depressed without expanding on that. Others talked about seeing less creativity in their kids and in themselves. Many did, however talk about how the arts have been a lifeline to them during the pandemic. Several mentioned the murals that went up all over Seattle in boarded up buildings.

Chair Malkin asked what feedback the Council gave to the same presentation. Mr. MacDonald said the presentation to the Council was made just before they considered the tax increase for affordable housing of 0.1 percent. The mayor asked the Council to submit questions and comments, and comments that were just follow-up questions were submitted. Unfortunately there was no opportunity for a full discussion.

Chair Malkin commented that similar surveys have been done in the past and said they have been used as data points to bolster increased funding for the arts. The allocation for the arts has not seen an increase for nearly 20 years. Mr. MacDonald pointed out that the budget under consideration by the Council has no cuts to the grant or public art allocations, though it also includes no increases. In a year where the city is facing a ten percent budget shortfall, it is significant that the arts programs are not facing cuts.

- COMMISSION OUICK BUSINESS None
- REPORTS

- A. Commissioner's Committee and Lead Reports As Noted
- B. Project Updates from Staff

Ms. Stamm said the PowerUp cohort, which is separate from the grants but includes grantees, has had three meetings. There have been 30 to 40 people in each meeting and the level of participation from people across the community was strong.

Ms. Stamm noted that a survey regarding the BelRed Arts District is live and can be found on the city's Arts Commission webpage. She noted that there have been about a hundred responses so far. The survey will close just before the November holidays.

With regard to the Eastside Artists Roster, Mr. MacDonald said staff was looking at launching a utility box art wrap program in Bel-Red in early 2021. That program will most likely expand into the Downtown and other parts of the city. It will be open only to artists who are on the roster.

Chair Malkin asked if there are opportunities to keep promoting the roster beyond just social media. Ms. Stamm said updates to the roster will not close for the foreseeable future. Every opportunity that comes along to use the roster will also be tapped for promoting the roster.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Malkin adjourned the meeting at 6:31 p.m.