

BELLEVUE ARTS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES

January 12, 2021
4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Virtual Meeting

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Malkin, Commissioners Aldredge, Gowdy, Gulati, Lau Hui, Martinez, Wolfteich

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Scott MacDonald, Manette Stamm, Community Development Department

OTHERS PRESENT: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:31 p.m. by Chair Malkin who presided. All Commissioners were present.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

A. Approval of Agenda

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

B. Approval of Minutes

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

3. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. ACTION ITEMS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. 2021 Work Plan

Arts Community Manager Scott MacDonald said if 2020 has offered any lessons, it is that work plans are always a draft and subject to change. He said it is more than likely the City will need to respond to things that pop up throughout the coming year, triggering changes in schedules. In general, all work falls into six different categories: 1) grants; 2) BelRed Arts District; 3) Bellwether; 4) public art; 5) planning projects; and 6) other work.

Mr. MacDonald said the grants program is an ongoing program to which big changes are not expected. A review is planned for mid-year that will look at how well the program is functioning, and what barriers for access can be removed. If the review shows everything working as intended, the grants program will go forward for 2022. If revisions are needed

to the guidelines, they will be brought before the Commission for review and ultimately the Council for approval.

Chair Malkin commented that when the grant program was presented to the Council for funding in December, there was a sense that the Council was open to increasing the budget for the program. He asked if that is an element that will be worked on as part of the administration effort. Mr. MacDonald said the advice given by the mayor was to come up with alternative funding sources. There was no vote by the full Council and he said he had been instructed to hold off on that the additional funding issue until the matter can be addressed by the full Council. Chair Malkin pointed out that every year the Commission talks about seeking increased funding for the grants program, but every year nothing happens. Mr. MacDonald said the Commission is welcome to discuss the approaches other cities use in terms of funding grants. He stressed, however, that he would not be seeking a recommendation from the Commission until he gets the green light from the Council.

Commissioner Aldredge asked if the hesitation is that Bellevue does not know what its budget will be given the pandemic, and concern about possibly having to cut budgets. Mr. MacDonald said that certainly could be a factor, particularly in light of putting new dollars into arts and culture when other needs might come up. The prudent approach will be to take a step back to see where the dust lands first. He allowed that a strong case could be made for additional arts funding at the midpoint of the current two-year budget, and certainly as part of the next budget.

Chair Malkin expressed frustration with the fact that every year the Commission highlights the need for increasing the allocation to the grants program, and every year the same argument is made about possibly seeing changes made at the mid-biennium. Things are at a tipping point given that the city is growing much faster than has grown historically and there are many opportunities to fund arts and culture that come with that growth. Commissioner Aldredge agreed and pointed out that if the Commission does not advocate for it, no one will.

Commissioner Lau Hui asked if there were any incentives the Commission could consider that would drive Councilmembers in the direction of more funding. Chair Malkin said that has been talked about in the past, especially once the Commission was moved to be under the umbrella of economic development. The data is in hand that demonstrates the degree to which the arts and culture are adding to the city's economy.

Commissioner Lau Hui asked if there would be any benefit to having all of the Commissioners sign and forward to the Council a letter in support of more funding for the grants program. Mr. MacDonald answered that there certainly would be power in that approach. He allowed, however, that he did not know how the process would work and proposed adding the topic to the Commission's next agenda for a fuller discussion. He said that would afford him the time he would need to explore the process issues. Chair Malkin proposed keeping Councilmember Stokes in the research loop.

With regard to the BelRed Arts District, Mr. MacDonald said a lot of work is planned. The issue has equal weight to the grants program in terms of percentage in the work plan; it even approaches Bellwether, making the body of work significant. The economic development plan includes a strong focus on establishing the BelRed Arts District. The work plan specific to the district includes the art wraps program, several public art projects, the BelRed engagement report, the BelRed look back, and the BelRed Arts Implementation Plan. An initial draft of the BelRed engagement report has been submitted by the consultant, and a more complete draft is expected within a month or so,

after which it will be brought before the Commission. While the look back exercise is specifically focused on the BelRed Land Use Code and subarea plan, it will broadly include affordability, space for organizations and artists within development, and incentives developers can be offered for providing those spaces. The arts district implementation plan will identify specific strategies and programs for anchoring the district and making it a destination.

Chair Malkin asked about having the Commission more engaged in the BelRed engagement report in terms of being at the table. That is something that could be handled by a committee of the Commission. Commissioner Aldredge concurred, adding that she would like to see more Commission engagement where policy is being developed. Commissioner Martinez agreed as well, noting that she applied to be a part of the Commission precisely because she wants to be more involved on behalf of the community. Commissioner Gulati added her support for the approach. Mr. MacDonald pointed out that the consultant's work on behalf of 4Culture is essentially done. All that remains is to formalize the report. Where involvement by the Commission will be most needed is in regard to the implementation plan. He said he would put the topic of committees on the Commission's next agenda.

Arts Program Assistant Mannette Stamm urged the Commissioners to think about what committees they might want to serve on prior to the next meeting.

Mr. MacDonald said Bellwether 2021 is mostly planned with mostly artists who were originally slated to be in the 2020 Bellwether. After the 2020 event was canceled, the focus turned to developing digital works that could take place during the winter months, but when that failed to pan out it also was moved to 2021. One of the subtexts to the Bellwether planning work involves looking at how to move the program more out into the community in terms of having it led and run by the community rather than the city. Partner organizations are being and will be sought to take on some of the scope, with an eye towards taking on even more and pushing the show to an outside entity for 2022. Bellevue simply does not have the staff necessary to support such a big project, which has always been intended to serve as a community celebration of contemporary art. He said he would welcome engagement in terms of a Bellwether subcommittee.

Commissioner Lau Hui suggested promoting the Bellwether event should be robust. She noted that at a 4Culture meeting, several in attendance had not heard about the planned digital event. The overall level of awareness needs to increase, particularly among Bellevue residents who in turn can help to promote it as a destination event and a celebration of the city and the Northwest. Mr. MacDonald said the Council-adopted plan talks about Bellwether being run by an outside organization, and that plan is currently being followed. He agreed that the market event should be more widely promoted. Mr. MacDonald said there were city press releases and some paid advertising, though it was all done very fast and not in a comprehensive manner. The notion of companionship with the market for future Bellwether events certainly has merit. Commissioner Lau Hui urged staff to include the Commissioners in the promotional work.

Commissioner Gulati said it was her understanding the Bellwether curator would be changing to someone else. Mr. MacDonald allowed that 2020 was supposed to be his last year, but he will be staying on for the 2021 event given that he has already done 90 of the work.

Turning to public art projects, Mr. MacDonald said the Lattawood Park project would be wrapping up soon. Wiring for the project is under way. The artwork is already in place.

Mr. MacDonald said the public art policies, while not a flashy thing, is a priority in that it gets to how to support local artists as well as the general nuts and bolts of taking care of the city's collection, acquiring new works and deaccessioning works where needed. The policies direct how the city takes on art, how it advertises for art, and how to think about opportunities. The topic is one which could benefit from having a subcommittee. There was agreement to talk at the next Commission meeting about establishing a subcommittee focused on the public art policies.

The gateway project at the northeast corner of Downtown Park should be installed in the third quarter of 2021. The project is currently the biggest project and it is on schedule.

Establishing a baseline for the city's collection is on the list of tasks for the year. It is an important element.

Work on the portable collection will focus both on siting the works and thinking about the type of future portable art collection acquisitions the city should focus on. He said he recently was considering Black History Month and wondering which works by black artists could be highlighted, but in fact could not think of a single work by a black artist. He said the collection enjoys wide-ranging representation across all other groups.

The city has existing art maps but they are somewhat out of date. The work of updating them will include giving consideration to focusing them outside artworks, which are much more accessible. The art maps have served as a big draw for the constituencies of the hotels and the regional libraries. Works on the maps are both privately and publicly owned, but all are publically accessible. The costs associated with printing the maps are covered by the public art program.

Commissioner Gowdy asked if the maps are available electronically. Ms. Stamm said there are two maps, one addressing just the Downtown area and the other showing art throughout the city. She said the current focus is on merging the two maps into a single map and making it available online.

Commissioner Aldredge said a new organization called Feet First focuses on walking routes maps. She suggested it would be good to connect with that organization.

Mr. MacDonald said there are possible art opportunities associated with Fire Stations 5 and 10. The funding could potentially be provided by the fire department from than from the arts program budget. The work would be more than the work load would allow for and thus there are questions about how the project would be managed. One option would be to contract with an organization such as 4Culture, which was done for the selection and design review process for Meydenbauer Bay Park. The works would be outdoor pieces sited at the stations themselves.

Mr. MacDonald said the planning component includes the Artspace market study, though the project has not yet been funded. Chair Malkin asked if there might be a partnership with EastHub given their model of working with commercial developers. Mr. MacDonald said Artspace has in some instances worked with commercial developers, but they generally develop their own projects. The Everett project with artist units above and community spaces below was a collaboration between the city of Everett and Artspace. The 4Culture offices operate under a long-term lease rather than a joint operating agreement.

Commissioner Gulati said there are cities around the world, including New Dehli, that encourage artisans by hosting large spaces broken down into smaller spaces for

individual artists. The intent is to encourage traditional art and art from all different parts of India. The markets are always in operation. Artists thus have a place to display their works. In Bellevue there could be a constant art market or even pop-up art markets in different places around the city and the Eastside.

Mr. MacDonald said there are a number of planning initiatives that are either or about to be under way. They include Eastrail, the Wilburton framework plan, and the BelRed study. The potential in Wilburton is huge given that the recommendation of the CAC that studied the area is for a lot of density and height. With the upzone, there is the potential for getting amenities that support and include the arts. The Commission will have a role to play. The Japanese American Cultural Legacy Project is not specifically a city project, but it is an initiative that is supported by the city. Staff have been working with a non-501(C)(3) community group that has roots to the Japanese American community that lived in Bellevue prior to WWII. The focus has been on a broader vision that is broken down into a series of components that collectively tell the bigger story. The group has also been working with the city on the NE 8th Street bridge, which is part of the Eastrail project. The bridge will have significant commemorative elements incorporated into it via murals and poetry. Working through the King County project, some city funding has tentatively been committed to help pay for the design of the bridge elements. The arts business retention planning element is new to the arts program and is focused on making sure the music stores, the piano repair folks, the custom guitar makers and others will be able to remain in Bellevue and make it through the financial fallout from the pandemic. Also in the planning category is a focus on tourism, which involves the Commission's shift into the economic development realm. Tourism is important to the Council. Bellevue is positioned uniquely within the region and is an exceptionally diverse community of people from all over the world. The arts offerings that come from such a community are rich and can drive tourism.

Chair Malkin asked where the Grand Connection fits into the overall work plan. Mr. MacDonald said he has not had anyone talk to him about the Grand Connection in at least six months. The project is not disappearing, rather it is moving into the code-writing phase for incorporation into the Land Use Code.

Mr. MacDonald said the first part of the year will include a lot of focus on public art and caring for the city's art collection. He said he would keep the Commission updated on a quarterly basis concerning progress on the work plan. The care and renovation work that needs to be done will be addressed first.

Chair Malkin asked if the work would continue to look at the city as a whole and identify regions or parks that could be candidates for more public art, similar to the approach taken with Lattawood and Bridle Trails. Mr. MacDonald said that issue should be part of the policy discussion. He said the reality in regard to smaller projects is that they are in many ways much more complicated and time consuming, even where the budgets are smaller. They generally operate on much smaller margins and any issues that come up can simply stop a project. Larger projects have more flexibility and they generally involve artists who have a lot more experience working at scale, and they are usually easier to manage with fewer staff. Consideration should be given to the different types of projects and opportunities that can give folks a leg up and help build the arts bench on the Eastside. Often selection panels are left to choose from the same group of people. In light of supporting a diverse community and being accessible and equitable, it is very important to think through all of the steps that help folks get there. Otherwise things will end up in the same loop.

B. Utility Box Wrap Program

Ms. Stamm noted that many cities engage in programs to wrap or paint utility boxes. Such boxes are a ubiquitous fixture in different cities, and many of those cities own the boxes, making it easier to get artwork onto them. Bellevue has wrapped a few boxes in the past. She said the cities of Tacoma, Washington, Los Gatos and Sacramento in California, and Niagara Falls in Ontario, Canada, all have utility box wrapping programs, though each is slightly different. The intent is to take the lessons learned from those cities and applying them to boxes located in the BelRed area. Tacoma started its program in 2015. The city offered a thousand dollar stipend to artists who had responded to an RFQ and who were subsequently selected. In all, 20 different designs were reproduced on more than 40 boxes in that city. The designs were intended to enhance the public realm.

Los Gatos has been putting up wraps since 2016. The city provides a \$500 artist stipend. To date, five phases have been completed, with a different call for each phase. Artists must submit design and work samples which are then chosen and reproduced on boxes with vinyl wraps. Their goal is to create a safe, inclusive and interesting urban environment. The project is funded by the public works and parks departments.

Sacramento began its project in 2014 and also offers \$500 stipends. Artists are selected based on their past work, but are paid for new creations. To date, 29 boxes have been wrapped with designs by 32 artists. Their goal is to create a beautiful, safe, inclusive and interesting environment. The program is funded by the Capital Area Development Plan.

The city of Niagara Falls began its program in 2020 when the Lundy Lane business improvement authority approached the city as a major streetscaping project was under way. A single artist was selected and paid \$8000 to design wraps for 11 boxes. The goal was to create a vibrant community.

Ms. Stamm shared with the Commission the proposed timeline that included presenting a call to the Commission in February and immediately starting to advertise it. The submissions collected will be reviewed by internal city staff, including the Department of Transportation which handles all right-of-way permits. The call would close in March after which a panel will review the submissions and make recommendations to the Commission for approval in April. Once approval is given, staff will work to site the artworks, confirm the placement and final designs with the artists, and contract for production and installation. The contractor will produce and install the wraps in May and June, leaving the project to be completed by July. After that the wraps will be monitored and the program will be reviewed to look for lessons learned before starting the planning work for a second round focused on the Downtown area to start in late 2021 and flow into 2022.

The future call will be for digital or scanned artworks. The initial phase will focus on the BelRed area and will include up to 15 utility boxes. The call will be open to the Eastside Artist Roster only. The budget has been set at \$25,000, with \$750 stipend per box or \$1000 for box duos. The selection panel will be comprised of one Arts Commissioner, one community stakeholder and one art professional. The Commission will be tasked with reviewing and approving the recommendations of the panel before any implementation commences.

Chair Malkin asked if a single artist will be chosen to wrap all 15 utility boxes. Ms. Stamm said that is an issue that can be addressed in more depth when the call is brought to the Commission in February. She said to date she has identified 20 locations in BelRed, some of which have up to three boxes.

Mr. MacDonald said still open is the issue of whether there should be a request for proposals (RFP), in which artists would submit specific works for the panel to review and select, or a request for qualifications (RFQ), under which artists would submit their body of work and the panel would make its selections based on those works. Under the RFQ, artists could come up with a new design once guaranteed to get a stipend, or they could choose to license existing works. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages. The RFQ process is longer and more arduous for the artists to get their funding. The RFP process requires artists to do new work without guarantee of payment. The RFP process works better where the request is for existing art.

Commissioner Aldredge said her preference was for the RFQ process. Because the program will be applied by district and neighborhood, the opportunity exists to create something specific to enhance the character of those specific neighborhoods.

Mr. MacDonald said he had not considered that a single artist should be chosen to do all of the boxes. BelRed is an arts district and as such it should have greater artist representation. If the focus is on a particular corridor and the intent is to define that corridor, there would be a unique opportunity for a single artist. There are linear alignments within BelRed, but there are also districts within the district. There remain a number of factors to be considered before moving the program ahead with a call.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Gulati, Ms. Stamm said vinyl wraps last longer than works that are painted directly onto the boxes. The wraps already done in Bellevue have lasted for more than ten years, whereas paint only lasts for a handful of years, is more expensive and is more time consuming for the artists. Mr. MacDonald added that the vinyl wraps also protect against graffiti.

Commissioner Martinez asked what kind of works are submitted under the RFQ process. Mr. MacDonald said the works generally are samples of things they have drawn out ranging from sketches to fully finished and framed paintings. The artists also usually submit a bio on themselves, though resumes are not generally asked for.

6. REPORTS

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

Mr. MacDonald said 2021 will be a pivotal year for the BelRed Arts District as the focus shifts to establish it. With regard to the 130th project, the artist has confirmed the final schedule; his final design will be presented to the Commission for review and approval. The 2020 Bellwether Winter Market will be up at least through February 12.

One thing coming up that the Commission should be aware of is the city's upcoming celebration of Martin Luther King Day. The Commissioners were encouraged to attend. The city is also exploring doing a virtual experience around Black History Month with a focus on untold stories around American culture and history.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Before adjourning, Chair Malkin reminded the Commissioners to come to the next meeting prepared to indicate which committees they would like to serve on. He also stressed the need to stay on top of the Commission's desire to see funding for the arts program increased and doing what needs to be done to see that happen.

Chair Malkin adjourned the meeting at 6:15 p.m.