

BELLEVUE ARTS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES

May 4, 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, Department of Planning and Community Development

OTHERS PRESENT: Councilmember Stokes, Ben Beres (of SuttonBeresCuller)

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.

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 Gowdy and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the April 6, 2021, minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Aldredge. The motion was seconded was by Commissioner Gulati and the motion carried unanimously.

3. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. ACTION ITEMS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Bellwether 2021 Review

Ben Beres of SuttonBeresCuller said it has been difficult to continually re-imagine things, and planning art events has been no exception. He said everything planned for 2020 has been shifted to 2021. He said he was happy to be working with the Bellevue Arts Museum again, and just recently install dates, locations and new pieces were locked in. Hopefully it will be possible to have people gather for some of the performances.

Mr. Beres said the list of curators includes Anna Mlasowsky who had a show at BAM last year. She will curate a performance, most likely in Downtown Park, with multiple performers. Also on the list is Mo Quick who will do a popup event on September 11 or September 18 at

BAM. She is hoping to get dozens of Eastside artists, especially younger DIY artists. Priscilla Dobler is a resident of Tacoma and she has lined up about nine artists working in various mediums. Sarah Blood lives in upstate New York and Megan Stelljes lives outside Arlington. Their medium is glasswork and both have cutting edge creations. Molly Sides will curate video art for presentation on monitors in BAM lobby and on the Bellwether website.

Maja Petrić will be doing a big video projection installation on the Bellevue Way side of BAM. Some paintings will be displayed at the museum by an Eastside artist named Arvid Poothia, and there will be a panel discussion with three women of color who will be talking about their experiences in the arts. The piece above the entrance to the museum will be refreshed with a work by artist Eric Fisher.

Continuing, Mr. Beres said that working with EastHub is just starting. Discussions are under way about the organization doing something in Downtown Park, but it may also be at Meydenbauer Center. Radio station KBCS will help in the selection of the musical artists. He said the current focus of the Bellwether committee is receiving updates on the plans for 2021 and planning for 2022. Work is under way to lock in spaces and locations.

Arts Community Manager Scott MacDonald said the EastHub component will include looking at doing some sponsor development, which will be important for the long-term viability of the show and growing it. EastHub is also working on the marketing side and putting their experience into practice to push Bellwether to the next level.

Mr. MacDonald said the schedule calls for the physical artworks to be installed for all of September, with a focus on events September 10 to 19. He said there are challenges both with the Covid restrictions and BAM's lack of budget to fund a full weekly schedule. Events will be online for the benefit of those not able to be physically present. BAM has also talked about doing a 3D production of the works in their facility.

Commissioner Gulati asked if Bellwether will include using the NE 6th Street corridor. Mr. Beres said there will be light pole sculptures along that road and possibly some murals. That will probably start in August. Commissioner Gulati said the Bellevue Downtown Association is planning to hold its arts fair the weekend of September 4-6. Arts Program Assistant Mannette Stamm said there have been talks with the BDA to explore ways to collaborate and build off of each other.

Chair Malkin asked if conversations with EastHub about marketing have started. Mr. MacDonald said that they have and that he recently received a proposal. He stressed that they are not yet under contract. Chair Malkin noted that 2019 was a great year for Bellwether in terms of attracting an audience and he said he was curious about how to move forward with reenergizing the community having lost a full year. Mr. Beres said in one conversation with EastHub it was noted Bellwether is poised to be one of the only art events happening. Bumbershoot and a number of other music festivals will not be happening, and with good marketing the event could have an excellent draw.

B. Grant Program Updates

Ms. Stamm noted that the city has a robust Art and Culture grants program that provides support to many organizations across the Eastside and Seattle. Each year staff and the consultants receive feedback on different elements of the grants process, and it has been compiled and reviewed as a way of ensuring a grants program that is as effective and accessible as possible. She said staff have been engaged in conducting some funding research given the correlation between funding levels and what can be given back to the community. Over the years, organizations have been incentivized to be sustainable, which has helped more

organizations be eligible for the Eastside Arts Partnerships. As the pool increases, however, less funding is available for each organization. Funding has varied over time and has generally increased. In 2002 grant funding from the City of Bellevue's general fund totaled just over \$70,000, and in 2021 the total is at \$130,000. The highest funding level was in 2016 when it reached just over \$140,000.

The initial target of the current review includes incorporating some administrative changes for 2022, and longer-term targets that might result in more programmatic changes. The review includes five elements, beginning with feedback and lessons learned. The key questions revolve around the recommendations and suggestions made over the last three grant cycles. The review will ask if the changes target the guidelines, the application process, outreach or other elements, and whether the lessons learned from the pandemic might allow the grants program to be more adaptable.

The second part of the review will focus on the program goals and will center on what the changes made to the program in 2016 under Arts Program Manager Joshua Heim were and whether they are being achieved, if they are still relevant, and what can be done to make them better.

In the third part of the review, the focus will be on the grants program and how it compares to grant programs in place by other municipalities around Puget Sound. By looking at other programs, the review will facilitate amending Bellevue's program with elements that will make it better. Mr. MacDonald said one thing that will receive attention is the common languages used by the various jurisdictions. Bellevue typically translates into five languages to benefit the subsets of the community that are very active in the arts. The review will help identify which groups the program should be reaching out to and if there are ways to make it easier for those groups to read through the application and respond in terms of who they serve and the tangible benefits their programs provide. The methods used by other jurisdictions in eliciting that information will be incorporated into Bellevue's program where possible.

The fourth part of the review involves an equity review. It will focus on who is being served and if programs are being funded that benefit the whole community. It will also seek to determine if there are barriers that prohibit access to the grants program that could be removed, and what improvements can be made to improve outreach to all diverse communities.

Part five of the review will consider making subtle changes to the granting timeline to allow applications more time to review the guidelines and make application, and for the city to promote the grants program.

Ms. Stamm said the next steps would involve finalizing the review plan before bringing a final proposal to the Commission. She noted that the Grants and Funding Committee, comprised of Commissioners Malkin, Gulati and Lau Hui, will serve as consultants throughout the process.

Councilmember Stokes noted that there have been some major changes over the years. He said it is a fairly strong time for arts and culture in Bellevue, and everything is being looked at from a different viewpoint, largely as a result of the pandemic, the projected huge increase in employees in the Downtown, the city's growing diversity, and a greater appreciation for arts and culture in general. The Commission is poised to fill the gap and make a big contribution to the community. That will take more funding and the Council will need to recognize the need to go big.

Mr. MacDonald said Ms. Stamm has not been focused on funding, rather her focus has mostly been on access. The funding question will need to be triggered by the Council. He added that there has been a 20 percent increase in the number of Eastside Arts Partnerships grant applications received since 2017 and that has resulted in more than a \$1,200 reduction in the average award. Additionally, inflation relative to construction for public art has far outpaced the standard inflation. The Newport Hills artwork which cost \$75,000 and took eight years to complete, would now cost over \$95,000. The city is able to take on the big landmark artworks, and small projects like the portable art collection and utility box wraps, but there is a missing middle of projects like Lattawood Park and Newport Hills, middle tier projects where artists are trying to level up their projects and running on very tight margins and little to no profit. It is great that the arts budget has been relatively consistent, but it comes up short relative to middle tier works.

Commissioner Gulati asked why it takes so long for projects like the Newport Hills project to be completed. Mr. MacDonald said the last three projects done on that scale have taken between five and eight years and the reason primarily has been staff capacity. There is also a lot of community outreach that is part of such projects. The Downtown Park northeast corner art project has a budget of close to a million dollars, thus the firm is able to devote its entire year to the project. They also have established engineers, fabricators, and installers they regularly work with. Even under the best of conditions, a \$75,000 project will take two or three years to complete, and that cannot be a full-time job for an artist.

Councilmember Stokes said the time it takes for projects to come online is not limited to arts projects and programs. He said it can take seven or eight years to do anything for a number of reasons ranging from staff capacity and funding. The Council is aware of that and is concerned. What is clear, however, is that things are moving rapidly in the community and the city is having to play catch-up.

Commissioner Aldredge said none of her public projects have run longer than three years, even those in the half million dollar range. In some jurisdictions where there are staff challenges, they hire consultants to take projects through to completion. That is a strategy the Commission might discuss and recommend to the Council. Another thing to think about when interviewing artists is what their other commitments are. She said she has always tried to have no more than one project going per year to avoid juggling three or four projects, which can negatively impact the quality of the work and can drag out the delivery time. It is also necessary for the city to make the artists will make a profit on the projects they take on. The Downtown Park project splits out the design contract from the fabrication contract. That lets the artist adjust for costs at the time they are commissioned to fabricate. Fabrication contracts should be drafted so as to ensure the artist will get a materials payment immediately. Mr. MacDonald said those provisions are written into the contracts, though he allowed there likely is a better way to ask pertinent questions about the artist's workload.

With regard to the grants program, Chair Malkin asked for a follow-up on the Power Up grants. He said he would like to see that portion of the grants program expanded per cycle. Every organization needs funding, but they also need the skills the program provides. Mr. MacDonald said the program is a good one. He said it will be included in the review, primarily in the category of lessons learned and in addressing the gap between the needs and the available funding.

C. BelRed Creative Consultancies Report

Ms. Stamm reminded the Commissioners that artist Katie Miller was hired through the 4Culture Creative Consultancies program in 2020. She worked on Phase 1 and Phase 2 which resulted in a very large study and final report which will be made available for delivery to

various constituencies. She noted that the draft report had been included in the Commission packet.

Mr. MacDonald said Phase 3 of the project will focus on a BelRed Arts District Action Plan. The engagement report will be reviewed in detail to identify highlighted elements and to add in known potential avenues for helping support or realize the BelRed Arts District. The work will involve researching the individual components and the viability of each to set the stage for the action plan. The areas to be addressed include artist affordable housing, live/work spaces, affordable performance spaces, and public art wayfinding. The framework plan will outline the best avenues for success.

Chair Malkin asked how soon the community governing committee will be formulated. Mr. MacDonald said as part of the development of the action plan, a group will be pulled together that will form the basis for becoming the community governing committee. In addition to that piece, there could also be stakeholder partnerships that could include any of the major BelRed employers. Both will be critical to building a sustainable arts district.

Chair Malkin said the report that was provided touches on a lot of things that are difficult to address, such as rents going up due to light rail coming in. Many artists are having to reevaluate whether or not they can stay in the neighborhood. He said he did not know if the governing committee can resolve those issues and suggested that is where partnerships with the business community would come in. One option would be for the city to impose constraints relative to how much rents can increase. Mr. MacDonald said there are a lot of different mechanisms that could be tapped. Rent control is likely not one of them, however. There are incentives through the Land Use Code for developers to incorporate arts spaces and artist affordable housing. The city has tools it can use to guide developers in those directions, but there must be at some point things like direct partner investments. Chair Malkin said it will also be critical to attract new businesses that make arts districts vital, such as cafés and restaurants and places where artists can congregate.

Councilmember Stokes remarked that rents are going up for reasons other than just light rail coming in. Growth in the BelRed area and in the Downtown are driving factors. On the affordable housing side, Microsoft is currently engaged in working on workforce housing. Arts and culture are definitely part of economic development and a thriving community.

Commissioner Gulati asked if BelRed as a whole neighborhood has been officially designated an arts district. Mr. MacDonald said there is no officially designated area, though the general idea is to ultimately have it centered around 130th Avenue NE and Spring Boulevard. As part of the framework plan there likely will be a recommendation to have an official designation, and that component will probably be transitioned through the BelRed look-back.

Commissioner Gulati noted that a Ferrari showroom is coming to BelRed and said she had hoped the area would be a true artsy district. Mr. MacDonald agreed that it is hard for artists to fight against Ferraris.

Ms. Stamm said Ms. Miller's research showed that there are four drivers that are significant in implementing successful arts districts: collaboration; management of the district; financing, funding and sustaining; and how arts and culture are designed within the district. Many arts districts have different purposes. Some seek to attract large theater groups who want to also go out to eat and drink. Others focus on studios in which artists can create and display their works. Ms. Miller's key findings were shaped by the survey and the interviews. They include what is needed to promote retention and attraction; what is needed to bring long-term sustainability to the arts; the setting of goals and commitments by the city and accountability; and affordable space. The arts district governance group will serve as an important voice for

those elements. Many who responded to the survey indicated an interest in being part of the governance group.

The vision for what a successful arts district looks like includes being culturally and artistically diverse, having affordable spaces, gathering places like cafés and bars, galleries, and public art installations.

Chair Malkin said it is great that so much attention is finally being focused on the BelRed Arts District. He said cultivating partnerships with the business community will be key to the success of the district. He asked if EastHub could be leveraged as part of the mix. Mr. MacDonald encouraged the Commissioners to look up the presentation made by EastHub to the City Council on May 3. He said it was an exceptional presentation and served as an opportunity to hear from the organization's board chair. EastHub is broadly interested in the Eastside and is specifically interested in Downtown Bellevue and BelRed. They see light rail is a major benefit.

Commissioner Gowdy pointed out that the Equinox studio in Seattle's Georgetown area is a very vibrant community. Much of what holds it together is the collaboration between artists. There are some 140 artists with studios there. The landlord is very generous, and the rents are low. Twice a year they offer shows and events, but key to the overall success is the provision of space where the artists can work together.

Commissioner Aldredge said Equinox offers an amazing annual Christmas party. Folks come to shop and enjoy the food and drinks as well as the performances and music. The space is very basic, but the artists do not care about that. She said an option would be for the city to offer some sort of tax relief, bonus or other inducement for landlords to keep the rents low.

Chair Malkin suggested some lobbying of the large corporations moving to the area would be a good idea, including Facebook, Amazon, Google and Microsoft. Mr. MacDonald agreed there is definitely potential and suggested there is also an interest. He said staff does meet with and talks those organizations regularly. EastHub is also a potential player in terms of space and facilities as well as general support for arts organizations. There is also still the potential for an ArtSpace development. Chair Malkin said that would be great and would serve as the anchor space around which other facilities could develop. Currently the district does not really have an anchor.

Councilmember Stokes suggested that all of the elements are in place. All that is left is putting together the push from the community and having an organization like EastHub to come in and coordinate it. The city has done a lot, is continuing to do a lot, but cannot do it all. The pandemic coupled with tremendous growth is pushing the city to do things faster and is bring to bear a number of opportunities. Mr. MacDonald pointed out that there are more city staff working on the arts district than on any other part of the art program. The entire Cultural and Economic Development team is working on it and it will transition to others working on it as well as the focus shifts to implementing the different components.

5. COMMISSION QUICK BUSINESS – None

6. REPORTS

A. Commissioners' Committee and Lead Reports

Mr. MacDonald reported that the committee assignments will need to be reshuffled given that Chair Malkin is leaving the Commission. The position of Chair will also be vacant so the June meeting will begin with elections.

B. Project Updates from Staff

Mr. MacDonald reported that the 130th public art project is nearing completion of final design. The plan is to bring it back to the Commission at the July meeting.

Mr. MacDonald said after the Commission voted to approve the pre-concept for the 121st Avenue NE and Spring Boulevard project, there have been talks with the artists about the next steps and getting into the contract details. Those projects are both slated to be installed by the end of 2022.

With regard to the East Link project, it was noted that the *Root* has been reinstalled at Bellevue City Hall after being uninstalled for the last three years. The plaza should be fully done and open during the summer. On a sad note, the glass wall on the top floor of the Downtown station that would have allowed people to look down on the guideway was eliminated from the plan in favor of an oozing thing inspired by the glaciers moving through the area thousands of years ago. That artwork has been pulled from the station and Sound Transit is no longer working with the artist. There were concerns around how a fire in the tunnel would be vented and it was concluded that having the artwork protrude out would create a block for exiting smoke. Sound Transit tried to work through the issue with the artist, but the artist was not able to accede to what Sound Transit wanted.

Mr. MacDonald also reported that because Amazon is building on the north side of the transit station where Sound Transit has two artworks in the right-of-way. One is commonly known as Eggs on Stilts, though its actual name is *The High Road*. He said talks are under way about potentially moving the work to what will be called East Main Park. With regard to the other piece, *Windswept*, which is located closer to 108th Avenue NE, the talks with Amazon are focused on keeping it generally in the location where it is.

Councilmember Stokes said the area by the NE 8th Street station by Whole Foods will be given a Japanese motif. He added that there is the potential for a lot of art happening in conjunction with Eastrail. Mr. MacDonald said there are talks under way about drafting an Eastrail framework plan. As part of that, consideration is being given to developing an art plan spanning across municipalities to host both permanent works and programming ideas. He said the initial art at the NE 8th Street bridge is being developed by three Japanese American artists. There will be components on the bridge, including a mural and commemorative element, and there will be quiet and contemplative elements at ground level that talk about the history of the growers association packing house that was the original Japanese American distribution center.

Mr. MacDonald reported that the Eastside Artists Roster currently has a total of 85 fully registered artists. The developing opportunities specific to the roster will help to pull artists out of the woodwork and get them connected.

Ms. Stamm said she would have the final designs for the BelRed utility box wrap program ready for the Commission's next meeting.

Mr. MacDonald reported that his last day working on behalf of the Commission would be June 1. He said he was moving on to doing some consulting work. The economic development manager, Philly Marsh, will be stepping into the role in the interim. He said it has been the honor of a lifetime to serve as the Arts Community Manager.

Mr. MacDonald thanked Chair Malkin for his contributions to the Commission over the last eight years. He said Chair Malkin remained focus and has consistently been a great advocate for arts and culture in Bellevue.

Chair Malkin said he too felt honored to have been able to participate as a member of the Commission and in bringing arts to the Bellevue public. The current makeup of the Commission is excellent and has a wide range of diversity. He said he hoped the Commission would continue to champion the issues of importance to him, like ArtSpace and funding for the arts, and certainly art education.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Malkin adjourned the meeting at 6:21 p.m.