

BELLEVUE ARTS COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING  
MINUTES

December 7, 2021  
4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
Virtual Meeting

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Martinez

STAFF PRESENT: Manette Stamm, Lorie Hoffman, Department of Planning and Community Development

OTHERS PRESENT: Councilmember Stokes; Scott MacDonald, Ambergris Project

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

I. CALL TO ORDER

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

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 November 2, 2021, minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Aldredge. The motion was seconded was by Commissioner Bhargava and the motion carried unanimously.**

3. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. ACTION ITEMS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. BelRed Arts District

Arts consultant Scott MacDonald said historically the arts have largely focused on intangible measures and community benefits, things like representation, livability and storytelling. The arts also supplement education. There has been a push lately to turn STEM into STEAM, but when comparing the two, in most instances the A, art, is left out, primarily because for those in charge it is difficult to quantify what the arts add to the equation. Private arts education, to a large extent fills out what the public education fails to provide. There are many ranging from kids to seniors who are highly engaged in arts education, and many of them utilize BelRed for that specific purpose. Also among the intangible elements are exposure to cultural traditions, art for the sake of art, and healthcare. With regard to the latter, there is a lot of arts practice

incorporated into therapy and rehabilitation. While important and comprising the personal for why one likes living in a particular place, the intangible elements are hard to use to tell the story.

Mr. MacDonald said the tangible representations of the benefits of the arts comes down to economic development. There is a wide push within the arts world to talk about the impacts of the arts in terms of economic development, all while not forgetting about the more intangible benefits. The economic development category includes the arts economy, or the dollars and cents raised; tourism; revitalization; and workforce attraction and retention. Nationwide, the arts share of the Gross National Product is almost seven times that of all farming activities. There are things called Creative Vitality Indices, which are tools used by arts organizations to quantify the more intangible elements, but they vary widely from tool to tool and the benefits are difficult to explain to the community and to leadership.

The economic and personal benefits of the arts are not separate. The tangible feeds into the intangible and vice versa. The full scope of the community benefit flows from that relationships. The BelRed arts district implementation plan should seek to maximize the community benefit, not just economic development or the role of the arts in any specific area. The aim should be to achieve critical mass creative growth, a force moving on its own that does not need constant city engagement and is not reliant on a specific player.

Mr. MacDonald said what makes something an arts district is a very interesting question. Arts districts are essentially planning mechanisms. A creative community or cluster, is just a high concentration of artists and other creatives within a given space. BelRed currently has a creative cluster, though it is dispersed. It is comprised of musicians, teachers, dancers, educators, writers, painters and sculptures. The idea is to have the BelRed arts district be recognized as a specific contingency that is focused on arts and culture. The idea is also to convey a formal benefit through the arts district designation and all associated supportive measures.

Three arts district examples were shared with the Commission: Valley Arts District in Providence, Rhode Island; Wynwood Arts District, Miami, Florida; and Western Gateway District, Des Moines, Iowa. Mr. MacDonald said Rhode Island has a statewide program that allows for the formation of arts districts within which work created or sold is exempt from paying sales or income tax. The Wynwood district came about when business and property owners came together to create a business improvement district, which is a self-taxed district. The taxes generated go toward the development of the area as an arts district. The smallest of the three is the Western Gateway at only 13 acres overall, including a 4.5-acre sculpture park. Its focus is on arts education.

BelRed is a 900-acre area sandwiched between the Downtown and Overlake and is home to Amazon, Microsoft and other large and small companies. It is situated in a unique confluence of a lot of different pressures, including the development happening in Overlake and the Downtown. There is no room to grow either north or south. The 2009 upzone brought with it a lot of pressure to densify and redevelop. The thinking is that an arts district would not take up the entire BelRed area, rather it would more focused on the core of where the arts organizations and businesses are located.

The history of the BelRed area is important when it comes to creating an implementation plan that is about transforming a place. The history of the area has involved a long line of transformations that have sometimes erased people and cultures, and more recently the light industrial uses. The area is part of the ancestral home of the Snoqualmie and Duwamish, and more broadly the Coast Salish people. Prior to non-native settlement, BelRed had numerous wetlands and old growth forest. In the early 1800s it was almost completely logged of its old

growth timber, leaving behind a field of stumps which remained until the early 1900s when most Japanese American farmers removed the stumps and created farmland. In WWII the Japanese American people were pulled from their homes and incarcerated, and because most of them leased their properties, the landowners considered the leases to be broken. Of the 60 Japanese American families in the areas that are now the Downtown, Wilburton and BelRed, only two came back after the war.

Going forward, the implementation plan will provide the opportunities to think about how to transform the area in a positive, non-erasure and inclusive way. In 2009 there was a arts village designated in the BelRed subarea plan, roughly where the original Francia Russell Center was off of 136<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. Passage of the Economic Development Plan in 2020 specifically called out the BelRed arts district. The intent of the Council was to push forward the creative economy and to help support tourism. The plan specifically calls out helping to develop and establish the district with institutional and built infrastructure. It also calls for removing barriers in the Land Use Code. There is a long list of manufacturing uses that are no longer allowed in most zones in BelRed, but art as a manufacturing use is not defined in the LUC, so should a company or collective come to the city seeking to be allowed to have ceramics studio that includes a retail space, the outcome would be left to the person reviewing the permit. The communities that are intentional about supporting arts districts are very intentional about defining art as a manufacturing use and allowing the use everywhere within the district.

Also in 2020, the city contracted with consultant Katie Miller to produce the Arts District Engagement Report. The report included research about arts districts and a lot of outreach work. A survey of over 200 people connected to BelRed in some way, in addition to more than 60 personal interviews with stakeholders from executive directors for arts organizations to independent businesses, major developers and multinational companies. Some of the issues identified included confusion about the role of the city; a desire to see the city step up; a desire to see some sort of management infrastructure of the district along the lines of a business improvement district; affordability in BelRed; and how to develop support, be it financial or social, for the district.

Mr. MacDonald explained that what previously was called the Framework Plan has now been termed the Implementation Plan. The scope involves looking at Land Use Code precedents from across the country; specific policy precedents from other cities, states and counties; and programming different district models. The draft is focused on implementation and currently includes four specific areas: management, visibility of the district, creative space and connection. In terms of management, the focus is on a coordinating community organization and attaining a Creative District designation from the state. On the financial side, the draft considers having conversations about how to create a sustainable level of support. Visibility is a huge issue for the district. While there is a large concentration of arts and culture uses in BelRed, much of it exists in the back of warehouses or buildings away from the street, putting the onus of creating awareness on the branding and identity work. One technical centers on where the district boundaries should be drawn. There are also physical improvements that could be made in furtherance of the creation of the district.

With regard to creating a creative space, Mr. MacDonald said the list of actions to remove barriers could be as simple as determining permitted levels of sound, when an event or business would need to obtain a permit, and defining allowable uses. Measures will need to be developed that will protect existing spaces and create new spaces, such as through incentives for new development and public/private partnerships. The creative space issue should not leave out public spaces, including streetscapes and parks facilities. The city has far more acreage dedicated to streets than it does to parks, thus the role the streets should play as public space in BelRed is important to consider. Pedestrian streets that serve as linear parks, outdoor

galleries or event spaces could be developed within the street network. Additionally, supportive spaces such as small retail, bars and restaurants are very important to the success of arts districts.

Mr. MacDonald said his research of arts districts nationally turned up the fact that most of them have a defining center dedicated to the district where people can come together. Such centers are great places for crosspollination. More broadly, filling the district must be considered in terms of art walks and open studios, music and cultural events, and farmers and artist markets.

Mr. MacDonald said he would utilize the Commission's feedback in completing the draft plan which will then be shared with staff and the BelRed Arts District subcommittee of the Arts Commission. Once a completed plan is in hand, it will be brought back to the Commission.

Commissioner Gulati voiced support for the idea of a tax-free zone. She noted that Vancouver's Granville Island is a good example of an arts district. In Bellevue there are sculptures that are coming down as development and redevelopment takes place and she said the city should consider having a sculpture park where the works could be relocated. She said affordability is certainly an issue and commented that unless the city specifically allots spaces for artists, property owners are unlikely to charge affordable rents. Mr. MacDonald said there are two things happening in BelRed. First is the general pressure of price increases and property values across the whole district. Second is the identification in the 2009 BelRed subarea plan of what was called nodal development. Within the nodes there are tremendous density increases that are triggering the redevelopment of sites. The Spring District node is a good example. The nodes are primarily concentrated around the light rail stations. The arts organizations where artists are working are primarily located in the periphery areas. The best way to create new spaces is through incentivized development. Protecting existing spaces is of great importance, but incentivizing new spaces is equally important. A number of ideas are being kicked around but nothing is settled yet.

Commissioner Gulati stressed the importance of having all arts and culture uses concentrated into a single area. Development incentives, while effective, too often result in spaces that are scattered and widely separated.

Chair Lau Hui agreed. She concurred that most arts district have a defined center from which everything radiates out. That element is missing from the BelRed arts district. The city may have a parcel that could be made into a center in collaboration with a developer. It would be good to hold the city accountable for accomplishing certain tasks within certain timelines. Mr. MacDonald said the bulk of the plan will be focused on a three- to five-year time period, though it will also include some more aspirational elements. The desire is to develop a plan that can hit the ground running, thus demonstrating the city's commitment.

Commissioner Aldredge suggested that there are some economic opportunities the city could take advantage of in association with some of the changes being seen, much of which is pandemic driven. Retail continues to struggle and no one can say for sure where it will end up. Both Seattle and Tacoma have engaged in storefront programs where retail spaces are given over to artists to work in for six month periods. The programs have done a lot to activate spaces that otherwise have been empty. She said she saw nothing in the plan about artist housing, an important element in allowing artists to live closer to and work in the district. Mr. MacDonald agreed that housing is important both for artists and in terms of how to grow the district. In the engagement report, affordable space was a primary topic, but affordable housing was given much less emphasis, in part because many of the artists who are able to live in Bellevue are able to work out of their homes. Commissioner Aldredge added that if

long-term goal is for Bellevue to become a draw for artists from other places, affordable housing needs to be included.

Commissioner Gowdy noted that there are several affordable housing projects under way in the city and she asked if any of those units are specifically targeted to artists. Mr. MacDonald said the negotiations regarding the affordable housing projects on the Sound Transit began some six years ago at a time when there was no data to make the case regarding artist housing. Commissioner Gowdy noted that Imagine Housing owns a property on 132nd Avenue NE. Development of the site is in the planning stage and it would be a good place to consider artist housing units.

Mr. MacDonald concurred with the suggestion to see art made or showcased in empty storefronts. Chair Lau Hui said Pacific Center in Seattle saw a lot of retail uses leave because of the pandemic. A recently article in the *Seattle Times* outlined how Pacific Center has made space available for marketing locally made art and craft products.

Commissioner Bhargava asked if the city is thinking about how it can leverage its arts and culture community as a tourism draw, and how local businesses can market themselves to draw in more people, adding to the tourism economy. Additionally, consideration should be given to creating spaces for use by traditional artists as well as digital artists. Mr. MacDonald agreed there should be a focus on how the traditional and digital art forms can work together and on offering the full gamut of experiences. The BelRed Art District's niche within the regional tourism draw should be considered along with what the character of the area is when thinking about building awareness of the district.

Arts Program Assistant Annette Stamm clarified that the BelRed Arts District subcommittee members are Commissioner Gulati, Commissioner Wolfeich and Chair Lau Hui.

Commissioner Gulati asked what is to be done with the sculptures being removed to make way for redevelopment activities. Arts Community Manager Lorie Hoffman said the city is working with the property owners in regard to Bellgate on 106th Avenue NE. It is likely the work will simply be relocated within the same property.

## B. 2021 Year in Review

Ms. Stamm reminded the Commissioners that the 2021 arts grants totaled \$145,000. The number of requests submitted was the highest ever at 46 totaling \$255,711. There were 12 new organizations and artists making application. No consultant was tapped to help manage the applications and market the program.

The year saw a lot of activity in the public art realm. The Council approved the contract for the Downtown Park Northeast Corner artwork by Marc Fornes. Installation of the work is anticipated for 2022. The 130th streetscape artwork by Po Shu Wang was approved for final design and work to develop a contract for fabrication and installation is under way. The BelRed streetscape artwork concepts by Jill Anholt continue to move forward for the site at 121st Avenue NE and Spring Boulevard. The artist is working with members of the Snoqualmie tribe and the Japanese American community to refine the concepts. The portable art collection was installed at City Hall while waiting to find more permanent homes. A contract was signed with ArtTech for restore some critical public artworks and to clean some others. The work is expected to continue in 2022. Finally, the utility box wrap program was launched with eight locations in BelRed.

With regard to Bellwether, Ms. Stamm said the event supported more than 65 artists and creatives. More than 2,000 people visited the Bellevue Arts Museum to see the installations

there, and over a hundred people showed up for events that included a panel discussion, workshops, live music and performance art. A total of 34 artworks were installed throughout the city, and the first Bellwether film festival was conducted online along with a panel discussion.

The artist roster continues to grow. Near the end of 2020, there were 30 artists on the roster, and currently there are 110. The roster has proved to be a good resource for Bellevue as well as for other cities. The Eastside Arts and Culture Coalition, started during the pandemic, has become the Eastside Culture Coalition. The organization has meetings every other week and continues to grow. King County Councilmember Claudia Balducci authorized a grant to continue the work of the organization.

There was some turnover relative to the Commission and staff during 2021. Chair Malkin left the Commission, but Commissioner Bhargava joined. Scott MacDonald chose to leave his employment with the city as Arts Community Manager, but Lorie Hoffman was tapped to take his place.

Ms. Stamm said in early January the Commission will be given an update on everything planned for 2022. The Commissioners will at that time be asked to offer their comments and suggestions.

Chair Lau Hui thanked Ms. Stamm for her amazing work on behalf of the Commission.

Councilmember Stokes agreed that 2021 was an amazing year. In light of all the changes, the Commission worked hard to keep things moving forward. The Council and Mayor Robinson have indicated how impressed they are with the work of the Commission. He said the BelRed Arts District has been a topic of conversation for a long time and it is good to see progress being made. Coming up is the BelRed look-back planning exercise. The plan for the BelRed area was developed more than ten years ago and since then much has changed, including the new focus on arts and culture in the district. The BelRed as envisioned in the original planning is not the BelRed that has developed. It will be interesting to see what happens as the look-back kicks off. The exercise will actually be a look-forward that will result in some big changes. The Commission is in a position of being able to provide input to and exert a lot of influence on the Council, particularly in regard to the BelRed Arts District. Nationally arts districts that exist in isolation do exist and do survive, but they do better when integrated with the rest of the community. The need to increase arts and culture throughout the city is clear and the Commission is in the forefront of helping the Council make decisions that will bring Bellevue forward regionally in a very strong way.

### C. Artspace Market Study

Ms. Hoffman reminded the Commissioners that in 2017 the city engaged with Artspace to conduct an arts market study. Artspace is a non-profit developer of affordable commercial and housing spaces for artists and arts organizations. Their developments are family friendly and often include two or three bedrooms of mixed live/work space. Along with affordable living space comes affordable commercial spaces on the ground floors. The 2017 preliminary feasibility study was the first of six phases. The second phase, about to be launched, will involve an art market study to determine things like how much space is needed for affordable artist housing and commercial spaces, and the price ranges involved. The organization, based in Minnesota, has quite a few projects around the Puget Sound region, including the Mt. Baker Lofts, the Hiawatha Lofts, the Tashiro Kaplan Artist Lofts, and the Everett Lofts. Once the spaces are developed, Artspace stays on as the property manager.

After the arts market study is completed, the study work will be completed and it will be the time to step back and review the data, to determine if such a development makes sense for Bellevue, and if all assumptions are correct. If the review brings up a green light, the next phase will be the first of three pre-development phases. The pre-development phase will cost about \$750,000. A deliverable report on the arts market study is expected to be in hand in August 2022.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Gowdy, Ms. Hoffman said there is a small city-owned property near the 136th light rail station. The initial feasibility study had that parcel in view. She added that one thing that sets Artspace apart is that their properties run in the black and as such do not have to return to municipalities once their projects are open.

Councilmember Stokes expressed his excitement about the possibilities. He said it is great to see things moving forward.

Chair Lau Hui asked about the steps in the process. Ms. Hoffman said she needed to gather some more information on that topic. She said her impression was that the results of the survey will be brought to the Commission first before forwarding it to the Council. She allowed that funding will have to be found for the pre-development phases, but it will not necessarily have to come from the city. She said she will be delving into various funding paths while the arts market study is underway. Funding to actually begin development will likely come in part through a partnership with the city.

#### D. Donation

Ms. Hoffman shared with the Commissioners the fact that Jerry Lee approached the city with an offer to donate a work by Gerard Tsutakawa. The bronze work, titled *Josho #5* and created in 2003, is 7 feet 9 inches tall and was valued at between \$30,000 and \$40,000 at its last appraisal. If the Commission recommends accepting the donation, the issue will go to the City Manager for final approval. The work will cost the city nothing except for installation and any storage costs prior to finding a suitable location for it. Mr. Lee has indicated he would like to see the piece sited along the Grand Connection. Artist Gerard Tsutakawa is well known and adding one of his works to the city's collection would only raise the tone and tenor of the collection.

Ms. Hoffman said the work has traveled the world. On loan from the artist, it was displayed in Washington, D.C. at the office of the then Secretary of Commerce and former Washington state Governor Gary Locke. It traveled to Beijing when Locke was appointed US Ambassador to China. Brought back to the United States, the work was sold by the artist to the current owner and it has since been sited at MG2 Corporate Headquarters in Seattle.

Ms. Hoffman said the recommendation of the staff was to accept the donation pending the approval of the City Manager.

Commissioner Bhargava asked how the work would actually be moved. Ms. Hoffman said the work would be done by contracting with an art handler.

Commissioner Aldredge said it would be wonderful to have a Tsutakawa piece in the city's collection. She agreed the Grand Connection would be an excellent location for the work. Commissioner Bhargava concurred.

A motion to accept the donation of *Josho #5* for the city's art collection was made by Commissioner Aldredge. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gulati and the motion carried unanimously.

5. COMMISSION QUICK BUSINESS – None

6. REPORTS

A. Commissioners' Committee and Lead Reports – As Noted

B. Project Updates from Staff

Ms. Stamm reported that the 2020-2021 grants have all been completed. There were a few organizations that were unable to make their scope of work and were therefore not awarded any funding. Some of those organizations have reapplied for 2022. The East Link public art work at the South Bellevue park and ride is now in place.

Ms. Hoffman added that the Council had planned to return to in-person meetings in January, but they have since pushed that back. Accordingly, the plan is for the Commission to continue meeting virtually for at least the first part of 2022.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Lau Hui adjourned the meeting at 6:20 p.m.