

BELLEVUE ARTS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES

January 11, 2022
4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Virtual Meeting

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

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

OTHERS PRESENT: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:33 p.m. by Chair Lau Hui who presided. All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Gulati who was excused.

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.

Councilmember Stokes took a moment to share with the Commission that the Council had a good presentation at its January 10 meeting regarding all that is going forward from an arts perspective, particularly in the Bel-Red corridor. The presentation was well received. A number of Councilmembers wondered if there could be other arts districts in the city similar to the BelRed arts district. People are wanting to see art throughout the city. The conversation included the notion that the arts serve as an economic driver. The sentiment of the Council generally was how to do more.

Councilmember Stokes said a virtual meeting held last week was focused on EastHUB and Cloudvue. Brad Smith, president of Microsoft, and who has for a long time been a promoter of a having a performing arts center, participated in the meeting. Lawrence Lui, who is building the building that will be the tallest in the city at 600 feet when completed, also participated in the meeting. One of his buildings is designed to include a 1000-seat performing arts center for EastHUB. The city has a lot of opportunities going forward and the Commission is in position to push the vision.

Commissioner Aldredge asked how the enthusiasm and desire for more art in the city can be transferred into additional funding for the Commission to allocate. Councilmember Stokes said outlining the need is a good way to start things off. He said he would talk with staff about how the Commission can help in setting the tone and moving the conversation forward. There is a clear appetite for art in the city.

B. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the December 7, 2021, minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Wolfteich. The motion was seconded was by Commissioner Gowdy and the motion carried unanimously.

3. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. ACTION ITEMS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. 121st Scramble Artwork Concept Design Update

Scott MacDonald, consultant with Ambergris Project, informed the Commissioners that artist Jill Anholt has been working on the BelRed streetscape plan since 2018. In addition to developing the public art chapter of the streetscape plan, her scope of work includes developing two preliminary concepts for works in BelRed. She developed a mobile artwork concept and the 121st scramble at Spring Boulevard directly to the north of the bridge over the 120th light rail station and across the street from the Meta property. The site will be a highly visible location and a landmark for the light rail station. The original concepts were shared with the Commission in August 2020 at which time the Commission voted to move forward with the project. Since then there have been meetings with descendants of Bellevue's Japanese community and the Snoqualmie tribe to look over the concept. Additional meetings with the Japanese community are planned, and the concept will be brought back to the Commission for approval.

Ms. Anholt said the 121st scramble area is in an interesting transition zone. It is truly a place where the past and the present converge, notably the historical Beltline and the current East Link light rail line. It is also where the natural landscape and human-made infrastructure come together. As rail lines are designed, it is necessary to employ a cut and fill technique to level out the topography. The concept also applies to cultural history in light of the fact that some cultures were forced to leave and others came into the area. The pre-concept drew from the archival topography and turned it into a three-dimensional topography representing the original cut and fill. The proposal included the use of different languages to communicate the concept of cut and fill that would speak to the different cultures, both those forced to leave and those that came in. At the time the concept was presented to the Commission, there was interest in speaking to the different cultures. There were also issues raised about the piece not being substantial enough. The Japanese-American group reviewed the concept and approved it.

Continuing, Ms. Anholt said the reception from the Snoqualmie tribe was very different. Their view was that the concept glorifies an engineering feat that manipulated and destroyed the land with which they had a deep connection. They further felt the concept implied that time began with the construction of the railroads. The tribe noted that the concept was traumatic in the way it points out the destruction of the land that was lost, particularly in light of the fact that indigenous peoples retain a connection to the land to this day. The tribe evoked the idea that they are still here and resilient in surviving and living on the land despite everything they have been through.

Ms. Anholt said the comments of the Snoqualmie tribe forced her to look more closely at her colonial lens in light of the project. She said she returned to the drawing board with an eye on being respectful in developing something that would speak to the histories of all cultures. Prior to the coming of the railway, a vast forest ecosystem existed. That ecosystem was systematically destroyed by the colonial industry which saw nature as a resource to be used and exploited. The new focus is not on controlling and manipulating nature and natural

resources but rather is on learning to reconcile manmade systems with natural ones. The networks that exist below ground in forests that allows for communications between the trees is very complex. The new concept builds on the fact that there are deep roots to the land and interconnect through time via memory and stories.

I-beams and rail tracks have been the predominant language of industry throughout the colonial history of the Pacific Northwest. The original concept looked at recycling rails to express the erased topography of the landscape and colonial idea of controlling nature. But rather than focusing on the industrial elements, the better idea is to focus on the endurance of nature and the notion of industry being the accommodating one.

A model was created that looked at I-beams or rail sections existing in different planes, each of which was tapered, allowing for a very sculptural quality. Ms. Anholt said her thinking turned to the forest landscape and the tree roots that the Japanese-Americans were left to remove from the land in order to farm it. The new concept is tentatively called *Understory*. It involves the idea of using Corten steel I-beams altered and manipulated to create an organic natural form that resembles tree roots hidden below the forest floor. In one form the roots appear to reach for each other and interconnect, celebrating the resilience of nature and its rich interconnection to all things. There are two circular elements at the apex of the sculpture that mark where tree trunks might have existed above ground level. One of the circles has a mirror polished stainless reflective surface below that places humans within the natural system instead of in opposition or control of it. The form also references the story of early Japanese-Americans that turned previously logged areas into farmland that they worked and live on until their incarceration in WWII. The other circle is left as a void through which roots from below extend beyond the circle to the sky, evoking the memory the tall trees that once stood on the site.

Corten steel is a brown-orange material that slowly develops a stable protective exterior layer of rust over time. The visible change in color over time as it is exposed to the natural environment reinforces the concept of change over time. Until it stabilizes, it will stain surfaces near it. The tapered forms create spaces for people to inhabit, and the idea is to allow the Corten steel to naturally stain the concept below, reinforcing the natural weathering and the effect of nature of the industrial forms. Spatially and sculpturally, the new design is more beautiful and compelling than the original concept.

Chair Lau Hui commented that the new design is very powerful. She said she appreciated the feedback from the Japanese-American community as well as the Snoqualmie tribe. The work is very moving. It is definitely an homage to the history of the past. She asked if in some way through the use of materials or otherwise the work could in some way connect to the future. Ms. Anholt said studies show that trees communicate underground through the interconnection of their roots and through mycelium. When one tree suffers, the other trees send help to it. The site is near the Facebook/Meta building and in a way the notion of interlocking and interconnecting in the sculpture speaks to society and the connections between each other locally and globally.

Commissioner Wolfteich asked if the Snoqualmie tribe offered any reflections on the new design. Ms. Anholt said they were very supportive and touched by the new design. They indicated appreciation for having had their concerns listened to and were very excited about the new concept.

Mr. MacDonald said making a connection with the tribe was a very meaningful process. He said Ms. Anholt was to be commended for responding positively to having had a curveball thrown at her. She thought deeply about the feedback and responded well.

Commissioner Wolfteich commented that people likely will have a tendency to lean against the work or otherwise touch it and be close to it. He asked if the Corten steel will leave a stain on clothes or hands. Mr. MacDonald said the staining from the material is very localized. Corten steel has been used in public spaces all over the world.

Commissioner Aldredge praised Ms. Anholt for bringing forward a much stronger piece. It is much more complex spatially and it has a beautiful story behind it. Importantly, it is very inclusive. It is wonderful no offense was taken from the feedback and in fact it led to a much stronger artwork. She asked if there will be lighting associated with the piece that might help convey the future and networking. She added that the one negative aspect of the piece is the staining. Corten can stain significantly, especially in the Northwest climate and staining might be perceived as a defect. One option would be to not have concrete where the Corten touches the ground, allowing for vegetation or planting that would not show staining. Ms. Anholt said she had not yet looked at lighting for the work. She noted that the work of moving toward a final design will have to include the costs, and it is unclear if the budget will stretch far enough to include lighting. In terms of the staining on the ground plane, she allowed that people either love it or hate it. One way to deal with it would be to have a planted surface with low plants that take little or no maintenance, though it may require irrigation. She said she has used a bed of river rock or gravel with Corten that can be mixed up or changed.

Mr. MacDonald commented that lighting can get expensive where it is necessary to find and create connections to the electrical system. He said there is the possibility of bringing electricity to the location, or at a minimum laying conduit, as part of the street project. Irrigation could possibly also be brought to the site in the same way. Lighting and irrigation are both beyond the scope of what the budget for the sculpture will cover. In terms of the staining, he agreed that it could be perceived as a defect, but he added that he did not necessarily see that as negative. It could contribute to the conversation of how nature impacts the built environment, which is at the heart of the concept.

Commissioner Bhargava commended Ms. Anholt for the way in which she responded to the feedback and came up with another concept. She said she also was not a big fan of staining on the concrete and favored a more natural base through the use of river rock. She said one thing she particularly liked about the initial design concept was the inclusion of wording from different languages. She asked if something simple like greetings in different languages could be etched into the Corten as an homage to the fact that Bellevue has a wide mix of people and cultures. Ms. Anholt allowed that wording could possibly be addressed through the use of an art plaque accompanying the piece. She said the wording incorporated into the original concept are not as tied to the new concept.

Commissioner Gowdy said she liked the scale and movement of the piece. Those walking around it will see it from different angles. People will want to walk through it and be part of it. Having some kind of landscaping at the ground level will make walking through it more difficult and harder to maintain.

Chair Lau Hui commented that Corten is an expensive material. She asked if some of the sculpture could be made of wood married to the Corten steel, representing the evolution of time and changing demographics. Ms. Anholt said more will be known about the cost of the Corten as the final design work progresses. She said her preference was to use Corten, adding that in her opinion the work should be of a single material to sculpturally tie it all together without creating divisions.

Commissioner Aldredge said powder coating could yield the look of Corten without the staining issue. That could also reduce the overall cost.

Commissioner Wolfeich suggested the staining is not an overly complex issue to solve. What causes the staining is the runoff of water from the structure at its base. The issue could be solved by simply having a space border around the entry of the material into the concrete, keeping the runoff from being on the concrete around the base. That would dramatically reduce the staining.

Commissioner Martinez thanked Ms. Anholt for graciously taking community input and using it to rethink the design. She said everyone has their own view based on their experiences or the experiences of their communities. She said her family was able to come to the United States from Mexico because her grandfather was working on the railroad, and that in turn led to citizenship for the family. Not all communities feel the same way, however. It is refreshing to see an approach that seeks to find common ground.

Ms. Anholt thanked the Commissioners for their input.

B. 2022 Work Planning

Arts Community Manager Lorie Hoffman said the work plan is an outline of the things to come but she stressed that it is always subject to change as things come up. She said the work generally falls into six categories: the arts grants, the BelRed Arts District, Bellwether, public art, planning projects and the broad category of other. The work relative to the grants program will include the normal day to day administration of grant recipients, answering questions, moving through the contracting process, monitoring progress and assisting with in voicing and final payment. In the background, work will be undertaken to update the program guidelines for 2023 through an equity, diversity and inclusion lens while also keeping an eye with the ongoing pandemic.

Continuing, Ms. Hoffman said the work relative to the BelRed Arts District will see a lot of action in the coming year. The arts space market study will be launched in the first quarter, and work will progress on the public art projects at 130th and Spring Boulevard and 121st and Spring Boulevard. A mural pilot program for BelRed will be launched as well. Work to undertake the creation of a BelRed implementation plan will be spearheaded by Mr. MacDonald during the first quarter, and as that gets settled and finalized the focus will turn to launching a creative business association or stakeholder group to govern the arts district.

Bellwether 2021 was successful and the focus has turned to creating a best plan forward for moving the event forward. Mr. MacDonald will also be working on a Bellwether review and action plan that will seek to expand the work load for all partners and lessen the load on staff. Bellwether 2022 will be light, not unlike Bellwether 2020 in a move back toward the event's biennial roots. The 2022 iteration will have smaller-scale items and some social media takeovers, and possibly a workshop and market place. That will yield the time needed to make the transition to the community partner approach.

The plate of public art projects is fairly heavy for 2022. Installation of the Downtown Park project will begin. The Commission will receive continued updates on the 130th sculpture and the 121st sculpture. The donation of the George Tstuikawa piece by Jerry Lee will be wrapped up and possession of the work will be completed during the year. Staff will be putting out a call for the portable work collection buy as was done in 2020. Work on a new piece for the Crossroads neighborhood will begin, and work will begin on maintenance for the tiles in the Wilburton neighborhood and the creation of a few more tiles. The utility box wrap program will focus on the Downtown in 2022, and there will be some art associated with Fire Stations 5 and 10. In the background, there will be a lot of maintenance work undertaken during the year.

On the planning side of things, work will progress with the economic development partners across the Eastside to launch Arts and Economics Prosperity VI, the keystone economics study conducted every five years.

Ms. Hoffman noted that staff will be looking at the public art policies to make sure they are fresh and valid. Staff will also continue to work as subject matter experts across city planning projects, and in providing support for the Japanese-American Cultural Legacy project around the 8th Street bridge.

The other category includes all ongoing work with the Commission and with the arts community and partners across the city. New initiatives will be launched during the first quarter of the year, and throughout the year there will be a continued focus on caring for the city's collections. The Commission will be kept updated on a quarterly basis.

C. Portable Artworks Call

Ms. Stamm noted that in 2020 the Commission looked at the work load and put out a call for portable art works. The budget was \$24,000, with each artist allowed to receive up to \$2400 for artwork. In all, 20 different pieces were purchased from 17 artists, and the works are still on display. Given that the pandemic is continuing and that not much has really changed, it was decided that another call for portable artworks should be issued, this time with a budget of \$38,000, with a limit of \$3800 per artist. There is additional money for framing and taxes. As proposed, only King County artists are eligible. The eligible works are 2D, 3D and electronic.

Ms. Stamm said the timeline for submitting applications is January 12 to March 11. A panel will be established to review the submittals and make funding recommendations, and the panel will meet in April. The recommendations of the panel will need to be approved by the full Commission, after which the artworks will be collected and presented at City Hall starting in May.

Commissioner Aldredge asked if the applicants will be required to be listed on the Eastside roster of artists. Ms. Stamm said all calls lately have included that requirement. She suggested not including the requirement might open the door a little wider to more artists.

Commissioner Aldredge suggested that if the artists are not going to be required to be on the Eastside artist roster, the call should be open to King, Pierce and Snohomish counties. A lot of artists are not living in Bellevue due to the high cost of housing and artist space.

Commissioner Wolfteich said Commissioner Aldredge's point was well taken. He agreed that as a result of the pandemic there likely has been a diffusion of artists outward to some of the less expensive areas.

Chair Lau Hui suggested requiring at least one of the purchased works be made by a Bellevue resident. Ms. Stamm said different ways were considered to gain participation by local artists. She added that over time the city's collection has grown significantly with works from Bellevue-based artists.

Commissioner Aldredge said the call could include the statement that work by local artists will be given weighted importance when evaluating the submittals. Ms. Stamm agreed that could be added to the selection criteria.

A motion to approve the call, with the addition of adding Snohomish and Pierce counties to the eligibility criteria, and the addition of a sentence to the selection criteria stating that

Bellevue-based artists will be given additional weighted consideration by the panel, was made by Commissioner Aldredge. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Wolfeich and the motion carried unanimously.

D. BelRed Mural Program

Ms. Stamm said the BelRed mural program pilot is something that has been under consideration for some time. She said she was excited to have the support of the Commission. Murals have been done in the past, including for Bellwether and other programs, but there is no specific program just for murals.

By way of background, Ms. Stamm allowed that the BelRed Arts District currently has a very low visibility in terms of artworks. Murals are a great way to show visible program for the district. Pretty much every arts district in the country has a few murals. While there are a few murals in BelRed, they are all private and/or business related. The pilot program is intended to raise awareness in the BelRed area and to support local artists. Murals are a relatively fast way to get art into the public realm. By seeking corporate sponsors, the pilot program would not cost the city much more than staff time. The Council mentioned its support for the mural program at its meeting on January 10.

As envisioned, the program would involve putting out three different calls: one for a traditional painted mural and one for a light-based projection mural, and one for local businesses and property owners interested in allowing murals on their walls. The murals would cover up to 2000 square feet of walls in the BelRed area. As drafted, only King County artists would be eligible but that could be broadened.

The timeline includes publishing the calls on February 2 and closing the application period on March 9. A panel would be seated to review the artists qualification and make a recommendation to the Commission. The selected artists would then work to finalize their designs for final approval by the Commission in June. Wall preparation and installation would run from July through September. A review and evaluation of the pilot program would follow in the last quarter of the year before deciding whether or not to continue the program in 2023.

Commissioner Gowdy asked how many walls might be available. Ms. Stamm said there are a lot of different factors involved, including how open business and property owners are and the lifespan of the building. There is a lot of wall space in BelRed, including on new buildings, and some property owners are known to be interested.

Ms. Hoffman stressed that not all of the murals will be the same size. The budget for the program is \$135,000, with at least \$90,000 of the total coming from private sponsors.

Chair Lau Hui asked if the budget includes the design work and materials. Ms. Stamm said the artist would be paid \$25 per square foot to cover both their time and materials. Any wall prep required would be covered by the city. Chair Lau Hui suggested checking in with 4Culture about mural costs.

Commissioner Aldredge asked about limiting the call to King County artists. Ms. Stamm said she was not sure there were enough muralist artists on the Eastside roster to limit the call to just the roster. She said the call could be opened to the King, Snohomish and Pierce county areas, but just within King County there are a number of mural artists that might be interested. Commissioner Aldredge said she was interested in moving beyond just the tried and true in search of new talent, which argues for opening the call to a larger geographic area. She suggested also giving some additional weight to Bellevue-based artists, or at least to artists

that have a connection to Bellevue. Ms. Stamm agreed that artists with a backstory tying them to Bellevue could play out in their designs.

There was consensus to open the call to the three-county area.

Mr. MacDonald stressed the need to consider the BelRed Arts District as part of the greater BelRed area. He suggested focusing the mural pilot on just BelRed Arts District locations as a way of bringing attention to the district.

Ms. Hoffman said there has been a lot of excitement about the mural pilot program. Murals are understandable and accessible art. They go up quickly, they are bright and beautiful, and people can really grab onto them. She agreed that limiting the project to the arts district would be a very good idea.

Ms. Stamm said she would seek approval via a motion during the next update on the project.

Chair Lau Hui pointed out that it had been suggested in the past that the individual Commissioners should reach out to Councilmembers periodically to keep them updated and to promote art in the interest of the community. She said it would be a good idea to do that, particularly in light of the statement by Councilmember Stokes indicating that people in the community are excited about art in the community. Ms. Stamm noted that there are rules about how board and commission members are to interface with Councilmembers. She said she and Ms. Hoffman would review the rules to see what is allowed and what is not.

5. COMMISSION QUICK BUSINESS – None

6. REPORTS

A. Commissioners' Committee and lead Reports – As Noted

B. Project Updates from Staff

Ms. Stamm said the grant program is moving along nicely. The creative community continues to be amazing in adapting to the virtual environment in light of the continued pandemic.

Ms. Hoffman said she is working on the contract for the arts market study. The cost will be \$40,000 and it is hoped the contract will be signed and sealed in the next month or so. A final deliverable should be ready by August. She also noted that a first draft of the BelRed implementation plan should be ready soon.

With regard to the utility box wrap program, Ms. Stamm said a meeting is planned for later in the month. A list of the recommended artists will be presented to the Commission in February. She noted that the Eastside artists roster currently has 119 fully registered artists on it.

Commissioner Aldredge commented that while it is exciting that the Council is excited about programs like the utility box wrap project, the fact is the Council has not increased the city's art budget for several years. The Commission needs to push back on that with an eye on putting art in communities all around the city. The Council needs to fund the arts program at 2022 levels, not at 2010 levels. The Commission should strike while the iron is hot.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Lau Hui adjourned the meeting at 6:07 p.m.