

BELLEVUE ARTS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES

August 8, 2017
4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E -109

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Manfredi, Commissioners Jackson, Lau Hui, Lewis, Malkin, Wolfteich

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Joshua Heim, Scott MacDonald, Department of Planning and Community Development

OTHERS PRESENT: Kurt Kiefer, Sound Transit

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:33 p.m. by Chairperson Manfredi who presided. All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Wolfteich who arrived at 4:41 p.m.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

A. Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Malkin. Second was by Commissioner Lewis and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the July 7, 2017, minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Lewis. Second was by Commissioner Jackson and the motion carried unanimously.

3. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. ACTION ITEMS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. StART East Link Light Rail Art Presentation

Kurt Kiefer, project manager for the Sound Transit art program, noted that the East Link light rail project through Bellevue is well under way. The city's artwork that was previously located in the plaza at City Hall has all been removed and safely stored away; it will all eventually be put back. Work is underway on the I-90 floating bridge that involves stretching very large cables inside the pontoons to pull them together in compression. Construction of the East Link project will continue for several years.

Mr. Kiefer allowed that the operations and maintenance facility is not everyone's favorite project, but noted that it is necessary to run a transit system. The facility is a yard in which trains are stored and maintained. There will be two such facilities, one in Bel-Red in Bellevue,

called the Operations and Maintenance Facility East (OMFE), and another going north toward Lynnwood. Sound Transit has purchased the land for the OMFE near Lake Bellevue and adjacent to the old rail corridor. The southern end of the site will be used for construction staging and then will be turned over for redevelopment.

The OMFE will be built using the design/build contract approach. Sound Transit will issue an RFP, after which qualified contractors will be asked to respond with an outline of how they propose arranging things in the space. The site will house buildings in which trains are maintained as well as some offices, and places for the trains to be stored. While industrial in nature, the facility will be very clean. The hope in regard to the transit-oriented development spaces is that they will be privately developed mixed use buildings.

With regard to the Eastside Rail Corridor trail, Mr. Keiffer said a perimeter fence will be constructed to keep people out and screen the facility from the trail. The right-of-way is about 100 feet wide between SR-520 and the Wilburton station. An RFQ was released for an artist to work on the fence design. Sturtevant Creek crosses the right-of-way and there are two small protected wetlands as well. King County likes to build generous trails that anticipate both walkers and fast-moving bikes. Their basic trail width ranges between 12 and 14 feet with a two-foot shoulder and a one-foot buffer from any obstacle.

Sound Transit has submitted a master development plan for the OMFE. The city's usual code requirements call for a double row of trees in buffers. The master plan documents, however, call for using art instead of trees, primarily because having trees along the rail line can be problematic. The trains run on electricity provided through overhead wires and Sound Transit requires a ten-foot safety radius; if trees were in place and maintenance on them was required, the electricity would need to be shut off, effectively shutting down the line. King County has similar concerns about having tree debris in the form of leaves and needles falling onto the trail, as well as tree roots growing into the pathway, and would prefer not to have trees.

Mr. Keifer noted that Commissioner Jackson served on a Sound Transit selection panel to review the RFQ submittals. The hope was that submittals would be received from artists having experience working with things that are fence like, and that hope was fulfilled in the selection of artist Christian Moeller who has experience in linear and sequential works. Mr. Moeller early design ideas include a palisade that presents an oblique view and a dense surface that will serve to screen the OMFE. The palisade includes interruptions in the form of pieces that extend fairly high up into the air.

Mr. MacDonald asked if any sections have been drawn from the perspective of 120th Avenue NE toward the OMFE. Mr. Kiefer said none have been created to date. He said the OMFE building will be about three stories tall and it is possible it will be visible from certain places along 120th Avenue NE and maybe from the Spring District.

Commissioner Jackson commented that the Eastside Rail Corridor folks are responsible for building a trail crossing of NE 8th Street. Mr. Moeller has been asked to be aware of the work of the work of Scott Trimble, the artist who will address the crossing of NE 8th Street. Mr. Kiefer said the lower portion of the guideway structure that will cross the freeway will be about 26 feet above ground level. The Eastside Rail Corridor bridge will cross on the west side and will be very visible heading east on NE 8th Street.

Commissioner Lau Hui pointed out that the Eastside Rail Corridor may be the only natural green trail in the area. She asked what green noise control methods will be incorporated for those traveling the path. Mr. Keifer stressed that trains coming into and out of the OMFE will be moving slowly and as such will not be generating much noise. Commissioner Jackson added that King County is not thinking of the Eastside Rail Corridor as a trail people will

walk on, rather they believe it will be akin to a bike super highway. They do not intend to do much in the way of planting trees or other landscaping.

Commissioner Malkin asked who will get to see the gorgeous creative fence and if it will in any way be tied to the Grand Connection. Mr. Keifer said the work will really be more about moving past than stopping to look. The patterns in the fence will create interest to those riding by, and the intervening taller elements will serve to creatively break up the repetition.

Mr. Keifer said it was his understanding that Wright Runstad would be building a five-story bike facility in the Spring District. It will include a couple stories of enclosed storage for bikes, a bike repair shop and possibly shower facilities. Wright Runstad is banking on having a lot of people biking in and out of the Spring District.

Commissioner Malkin asked if there are plans to light the corridor for cyclists. Mr. Keifer said he doubted it. The OMFE will be lit, though not overly so, but the fence will not include lights.

Mr. Keifer said he would return to the Commission in October to present a more flushed out proposal. He suggested the presentation could include an update regarding the Spring District and Downtown station artwork.

B. 2018 Bellwether Program

Mr. Heim reminded the Commissioners that the recommendations of the Grand Connection Arts and Cultural Element include reducing the exhibit from four months to ten days; opening up the kinds of art experiences to be supported ranging from sculpture to multidisciplinary works; and shifting from a jury based program to a curatorial program, ideally with SuttonBeresCuller as the first curator.

Mr. Heim said the recommendations attempt to align the Bellwether program to the larger vision for the Grand Connection and the cultural corridor. The ultimate goal is to grow and build capacity for a sustainable arts scene in the downtown.

With regard to the updated framework, Mr. Heim said since its opening in 1992 the sculpture exhibition has been juried and held every other year. The intent has been to provide enjoyment to the community, to showcase a broad variety of sculptures, and to expand the concept of what sculpture is. The recommendation is to convert Bellwether to a free annual 10-day multidisciplinary arts exhibition and festival produced by the city in collaboration with the Bellevue arts community. The name Bellwether was chosen to symbolize the overarching mission of the exhibition and festival to showcase Bellevue's cultural and creative future, to stir creative energy, to provide inspiration, and to promote self-expression and out-of-the-box thinking to turn that future into reality.

Chair Manfredi voiced support for expanding the exhibition to include more than just sculpture, but said he liked the fact that for many years the Bellwether exhibition lasted for several months, giving the community plenty of opportunity to visit. There are pros and cons associated with compressing the exhibition to only ten days. On the pro side, the exhibition would become a calendar and destination event. On the con side, the limited time period would limit what could be seen during the event.

Commissioner Wolfeich noted that moving from biannual to annual will be a big change.

Commissioner Jackson agreed with the notion of expanding beyond sculpture to include other art forms. There is logic to holding the event at the same time as the Bellevue arts and crafts

fair, but there are also challenges in that those not also going to the fair tend to avoid going downtown on that weekend.

Commissioner Lewis observed that Bellwether might be more of a destination event if held at the same time as the arts and crafts fair. Commissioner Jackson concurred.

Chair Manfredi suggested it can be assumed the Bellevue Arts Museum would be very much involved if Bellwether were held concurrent with the arts and crafts fair, particularly given the museum's location.

Mr. Heim said there is flexibility when it comes to scheduling. The event could be held in mid-September while the weather is still good. He said the tentative date in July was chosen because of the significant opportunity to do something big at Compass Plaza. The city will be raising the level of the street to be level with the square. The intersection at NE 6th Street will be concrete but everything else will be asphalt and there has been talk of doing a big intersection mural on its face. The city is working toward completing the construction project ahead of the 2018 art fair.

Commissioner Malkin asked what the thinking was behind the ten artists number. Mr. Heim said he actually was putting the idea on hold for a bit. He said Bellwether has in the past involved displaying existing work, and the notion is to shift to more of a project-based approach.

Commissioner Jackson stressed the need to recognize that there has been a general lack of submissions for Bellwether due in part to the things the exhibition has previously conceived is outdated. Commissioner Lewis noted that recent surveys make that point clear, that attendees want more experiences and more music.

Mr. Heim said the existing budget will allow for conducting three Bellwether events in a row through 2020, after which it will either be necessary to shift back to every other year or make a concerted effort to see the budget increased. He said \$350,000 is allocated annually to the public art program, and funds can be retained from any given year in order to plan for bigger projects. During the last budget cycle, \$75,000 was programmed annually for the Neighborhood Enhancement Program. To date there have been two cycles in which there were no requests to integrate art into Neighborhood Enhancement Program proposals. Accordingly, those funds have been reallocated. As proposed, the Bellwether funds earmarked for the exhibitions housed in City Hall have been reallocated toward a yearly exhibition. He reminded the Commissioners that there are a number of community buildings without any significant installations, including the courthouse and the Bellevue Youth Theatre, and when East Link opens something significant may want to be done at City Hall. The funds are being set aside and it may be a while before they are allocated.

Noting the Commission's concurrence with the general framework, Mr. Heim sought feedback regarding the curator scope of work. He noted that the document incorporated the updated framework, mission statement, goals and objectives. He stressed that the objectives were the same as those in the Grand Connection plan. As envisioned, the curator will be asked to develop a curatorial approach that meets the guidelines of the program. The curator will need to identify the project and at least three artists who could be awarded a contract for doing the work. The choices must then be submitted to staff prior to requesting solicitation. The curator can be part of the selection committee, essentially as the jury.

Commissioner Malkin asked if it would be ten artists or ten art projects. Mr. Heim said the idea is that a project could be a single installation with a single artist, or it could be an exhibition involving several artists. One project does not equal one artist.

Commissioner Lau Hui said she understood having an exhibition running over a ten-day period but said she was unclear if a project would happen only once or need to run for the entire time. She suggested that it would make more sense to expand the time of each project so that people who cannot make it the first time will still be able to see it. Commissioner Jackson agreed that one of the challenges will be in making the program available to more than just those who work in downtown Bellevue.

Commissioner Lau Hui suggested having the artists perform in more than one location, including areas outside of the downtown. Chair Manfredi countered that that approach would take away from the Grand Connection connection and could draw attention away from the notion that the exhibition is a ten-day event.

Commissioner Jackson asked how many attendees there were for the activating spaces events associated with previous Bellwether exhibitions. Mr. Heim said there were not that many. The events were held at noon and aimed at the downtown lunchtime crowd. They were held in concert with the Bellevue Arts Museum free days. However, the City Hall staff enjoyed the events, and the Bellevue Arts Museum and others in the community liked the idea of being performance based.

Commissioner Malkin said one question to answer is whether or not Bellwether will get the same bang for the buck in a ten-day exhibition as it gets when drawn out over three months. Mr. Heim said the question was a good one. He said he had to discipline himself to honor the notion of a curatorial process. He said initially consideration was given to the number of opportunities to lead with murals, including the temporary construction fence around the plaza in front of City Hall and the Doxa church wall. By their nature, murals would not just be left up for ten days.

Commissioner Jackson said there are usually opening and closing events for the Bellwether exhibition. She noted her support for using the exhibit to focus attention on kicking off the Grand Connection by concentrating the dollars spent on communication on a smaller period of time, bringing more energy and attention to it.

Commissioner Malkin agreed and said the ten-day approach to the exhibit would mean folks could plan their visits to Bellevue around it, whether it is part of the overall arts fair or not.

Commissioner Jackson asked if there are similar examples from other small cities. Mr. Heim said a good example is Nuit Blanche in Toronto which occurs during a single 24-hour period, beginning in the evening. The Three Rivers Arts Festival in Pittsburgh is not city driven but has a similar ten-day format.

Commissioner Malkin noted that the ten-day period would include two weekends, which is the time when there would be the most activity.

Commissioner Jackson said she favored including mural projects, possibly with an unveiling every three days or so during the event.

Mr. Heim noted that as proposed, the work previously done by the Bellwether committee will be handed over to the curator. The guidelines will steer the process by capturing the attention the committee brought to the exhibit. The curator will be directed to express the mission and the objectives of the Bellwether program while exploring the theme of Bellevue as the cultural hub of the Eastside; contextualizing the program topic within regional, national and international conversations; contributing to or advancing Bellevue's art and cultural history; allocating a program budget for artist projects, including public programs and events;

contracting with the marketing team to do public events; and providing the programmatic intent of the overall show at the opening event. The curator will be responsible for the content but not the media, which ideally will include a website.

Commissioner Malkin commented that photographs and video of the festival should live on the website. As each festival occurs, the website will serve as an archive. A lot of good artifacts could come out of it if thought out ahead of time, possibly even a catalog.

Commissioner Jackson noted that the timescale is very tight but doable if the work already done by SuttonBeresCuller is leveraged. She asked if there are other, preferably local artists or organizers, who could be called on to do the curatorial work in future years. Mr. Heim said the Bellevue Arts Museum has been using guest curators for the last two or three years and may have a roster that could be used. It would also not be out of the question to consider using an organization to play the role. He said his hope is that the community will eventually take over the program, possibly a non-profit operating at first with a grant from the Commission, freeing the Commission to take on other programs in other parts of the city as the non-profit becomes self-supporting. The city's office of economic development is managing the tourism master plan in partnership with Meydenbauer Center and it is poised to recommend the need for an event strategy that includes community cohesion; that organization could ultimately step in and take over the exhibition as one of its roles.

Commissioner Malkin said he assumed the success of the event will be measured in terms of attendance. Mr. Heim said work has been going on behind the curtain to create a series of indicators to identify a vibrant arts scene in a given area. The information is still in raw format and not ready for prime time. Ultimately, the true measure of success will be the Commission being able to step back as projects get geared toward very specific things. For instance, the Commission could one year take on a very controversial topic, or one year Bellwether could become one big art school with classes and workshops. There are a number of different frameworks for how to evaluate arts engagement programs, but no one out there has come up with a tool for identifying a vibrant arts scene.

Commissioner Jackson commented that one cannot simply say Bellevue has a great arts scene unless people are talking about it. Until the community is interested in moving beyond narrow-casted performances, such as Indian dance, the culture will not be affected. Bellevue has developed silos in which specific art and culture experiences are housed and measured. Bellevue has no place to study art whereas Seattle does. Commissioner Malkin agreed and said his focus was on trying to reverse that trend.

Commissioner Lau Hui pointed out that Bellevue is much more diverse than Seattle and that is something that should be built on. Bellevue should not even try to replicate what Seattle is able to offer, but with the right type of niche programming, people could be drawn from Seattle to Bellevue.

Mr. Heim said the original intent was to go through an exercise and select the top ten things that should be focused on as part of the Bellwether arts scene. That could involve going out with a clipboard and make determinations relative to the various indicators. More time will be needed to work through the details, however.

Commissioner Malkin said something like that could work well throughout the year, not just for the ten days of Bellwether. He said liked the idea of having art intensives, like art schools and workshops, intended to draw people to Bellevue specifically to study in focused areas. Such things would not necessarily need to happen during the ten days of the festival. Commissioner Jackson agreed and said building up an arts and culture economy and a cultural community will require more than just saying Bellevue has a certain number of game

companies and a certain number of dance companies. It is one thing to get game companies to move to Bellevue, but if the artists in those game companies do not see art around them and the schools do not talk about art in the context of games, the necessary synergy will be lacking. People move to Austin because they know there are lots of creative people there. That is also what happens in Los Angeles and New York.

Commissioner Malkin said it is curious that for some reason Portland has become a center for photography. The town hosts a large number of photography galleries and schools. There are many photographers in Bellevue as well, but there are no galleries or schools. Portland becoming a center for photographers likely happened organically and not because the local arts commission decided it should happen.

Chair Manfredi said the scope of work is generally good and offers good direction. He said on the critical question of who should serve as curator, he would support the selection of SuttonBeresCuller given all the work the team has done to date; they certainly could hit the ground running.

Commissioner Jackson said her only concern was that by constantly delegating and hiring out the work that has traditionally been done by the Commission, the Commission may not be doing its job adequately. The Commission exists largely to provide input on behalf of the community. Chair Manfredi allowed that the point was well made. He commented that having made the decision is a major step and using Bellwether to respond to the emergence of the Grand Connection is also a relatively major step. Another way to look at it is that in the coming years specific companies may no longer be involved, but the Arts Commission will. The role of the Commission is and will continue to be to take the larger view and making sure the various segments fit together. The organizations tapped to undertake the work are given guidance from the Commission. To the degree the Commission continues to be intentional about paying attention to its multicultural constituents and avoids bringing in New York and Los Angeles artists who know nothing about the community, the Commission will be doing its job.

Mr. Heim pointed out that in the past proposals for the Bellwether exhibition were actually never brought before the Commission. The proposed approach has the proposals before the Commission twice, first to outline the big questions and themes, and second to present initial concepts. The idea going forward is for the Bellwether committee to convene to set the scope and call for a curator, following which a public process would be launched to actually select the curator.

Mr. Heim asked for comment on whether or not the curator should explore the notion of the cultural hub of the Eastside, which was an organizing principle behind the Cultural Compass.

Commissioner Jackson said Bellevue certain can and does act as if it is the cultural hub of the Eastside. She stressed, however, not giving lip service to things that are not real, such as calling Bel-Red an arts district and then upzoning it so that no artist can ever afford to live there, including those who are already there.

Chair Manfredi said the issue is essential for the Commission to consider, not to just say it is what it is but rather to ask the question. The topic should indeed be included and explored.

Commissioner Lewis commented that things happen in Redmond and other places on the Eastside and suggested that Bellevue does not necessarily have to be the cultural hub of the Eastside. Bellevue is the biggest city, however. Commissioner Malkin suggested that if Bellevue consciously starts doing art events and cultivating art activity, by default Bellevue

will become the cultural hub of the Eastside. That is not to say that the art activities that occur in other jurisdictions will go away, but the mass of activity should occur in Bellevue.

5. COMMISSION QUICK BUSINESS

Mr. Heim noted the need to move the September 5 Commission meeting to September 12. The Commissioners agreed to make the change.

Commissioner Jackson proposed that for meetings going forward an arts group should be invited to attend and provide an update. Mr. Heim said he could do that and provide the groups with five to ten minutes each.

6. REPORTS

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

Mr. Heim reported that the Creative Edge website has gone live.

7. CORRESPONDENCE, INFORMATION

- A. Written Correspondence – As Noted
- B. Project Updates from Staff – As Noted

8. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Manfredi adjourned the meeting at 6:25 p.m.