

BELLEVUE ARTS COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING  
MINUTES

November 4, 2008  
4:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
Room 1E -109

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Finley, Commissioners Donkin, Holder, Kiselev, Ptacek, Shepherd, Tremblay

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Mary Pat Byrne, Tamar Benzikry-Stern, Department of Planning and Community Development

OTHERS PRESENT: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:08 p.m. by Chairperson Finley who presided. All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Kiselev, who arrived at 4:13 p.m., and Commissioner Ptacek, who arrived at 4:22 p.m.

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

A. Approval of Agenda

**Motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Donkin. Second was by Commissioner Tremblay and the motion carried unanimously.**

B. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Tremblay called attention to the last paragraph on page 3 and suggested the addition of a sentence reading "Commissioner Ptacek again suggested that the Foundation could apply through the city's regular special projects funding process." She also called attention to the eighth paragraph on page 4 and asked to have added to it at the end "considering the amount that was already spent on a program around the sculptures."

**Motion to approve the October 7, 2008, minutes as amended was made by Commissioner Holder. Second was by Commissioner Shepherd and the motion carried unanimously.**

III. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

IV. ACTION ITEMS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Bellevue Sculpture Exhibition Evaluation

Arts Specialist Mary Pat Byrne informed the Commissioners that not all of the invoices from the Bellevue Sculpture Exhibition had been received, thus it was not possible to say exactly what the final tally was. She reminded the Commissioners that the Commission had been informed several months ago that due to installation costs the budget would be higher than originally planned.

Public Art Project Coordinator Tamar Benzikry-Stern explained that the report begins with the mission statement and the two goals that were particular to the 2008 exhibition. She noted that she had also included the three goals from the 2006 exhibition because they had been used to inform the committee's process.

Ms. Benzikry-Stern said the first goal, Enhancing the Quality of the Artwork, was addressed through the use of a theme, in the selection of jurors and advisors, and in the process for acquiring applications and selecting artwork. Seventy-five percent of the artists who submitted work for review addressed the theme in some way. Feedback for the use of a theme in general, and the specific theme in particular, was very positive.

Ms. Byrne said she asked several of the participating artists if they thought the 2008 theme might be old by 2010. The overwhelming response was that it will not be, that in fact if anything there will be even more artists working in the vein.

Commissioner Tremblay said themes are a great way of packaging something and selling it. They offer a way to connect to the community at large as well as to specific segments of the community. If executed well, themes can go a long way toward creating an identity for an exhibition.

Chair Finley and Commissioners Holder and Shepherd said they did not have strong opinions one way or another about having a theme. Commissioner Holder said her focus would also be on quality. Commissioner Shepherd said it was fun to see how the theme played out but it did not offer any particular benefit over previous exhibitions that did not have a theme. Commissioner Donkin concurred.

Commissioner Holder asked if any of the artist feedback indicated that the theme was too limiting for them. Ms. Benzikry-Stern said there were some artists who commented about not liking themes in general; they said they would prefer to have their works selected for quality and message rather than because they happen to fit a particular theme. Other artists commented positively on the theme, saying the choice of addressing sustainability through materials, technique and/or content provided options within the theme while providing an overall cohesion to the exhibition.

Commissioner Holder asked if the jurors selected some of the works precisely because they fit the theme well. Providing information on the backgrounds of the various jurors, Ms. Benzikry-Stern said there was a strong interest in selecting works of high quality as well as pieces that linked to the theme. It is hard to know whether or not some works were selected only because they held a relationship to the theme.

Ms. Byrne said jurors will always have personal biases and preferences. Certainly some of that came into play during the process. She said it was clear to her from the range of work that came in that artists were experimenting with new materials. Over time, their manipulation of those new materials will become more sophisticated. A large number of works that fit the theme were tossed out because they did not have the quality.

Commissioner Donkin said one of the ideas considered in the past was having a curator as opposed to a jury. He said it would be interesting to at least discuss that notion. There would still be an open call, but it could result in an even higher level of work. He said he was not overly thrilled with the works in the recent exhibition; there were restrictions because of the theme and because of the tastes of the jurors. Some artists may not have applied at all because there was a theme in place.

Commissioner Tremblay said she would be interested in exploring that option. She added that a curator will likely have a very particular point of view.

Ms. Byrne noted that some potential jurors indicated in their interviews that they would prefer to be curator rather than juror; their intent was to have the freedom to pick all the works. If the curator approach were to be used, it would be necessary to choose the right one and to have a thorough discussion ahead of time regarding the vision for the exhibition. She added that the city must have the final say about the works accepted for the show for liability reasons. She said she would be willing to experiment with having a curator provided there were clear guidelines set up ahead of time.

Commissioner Tremblay said she would like to see a local curator have such a large canvas to work on. Ms. Byrne noted that artists will often choose which shows to be in based on the curator. To raise the overall quality of the show it would be necessary to get the highest quality curator.

Commissioner Kiselev pointed out that the Commission does not have full control even with the juror system. The Commission selects the jurors, but the jurors select the works to be in the show. Commissioner Tremblay agreed and pointed out that that arbitrariness figures heavily into whether or not pieces from the exhibition are ultimately purchased by the city.

Continuing with the report, Ms. Benzikry-Stern said several advisors were involved in the exhibition. Most represented education-oriented programs or organizations, including the Bellevue Arts Museum education coordinator, the Bellevue School District, Ground Zero and Ground Speak. The focus on education regarding the teen project led to a partnership with the schools, which in turn influenced the Bellevue School District annual art show which selected a green theme as well.

Ms. Benzikry-Stern said the prospectus was delivered by mail to 1534 artists, to 1,810 more artists by email, and was highlighted in a number of online forums. The installation worksheet, which required artists to detail the method of installation for their sculptures, was new to the exhibition and proved to be helpful in artist/city/installation contractor communication.

There were 262 entries by 122 artists. The outdoor entries were trumped in number by the indoor entries, which is normal. The jury shortlisted a total of 68 works, and after the risk assessment there remained a total of 38 installations by 33 artists; 22 were indoor (including the teen project), and 17 were outdoor. Fifty-one percent of the artists were from Washington state; the balance were from across the county and from British Columbia.

Ms. Byrne noted for the second year at new City Hall more sites were found for art works which made the show more engaging. Restoration costs also increased; this year City Hall cleanup costs for patching and repainting were estimated at about \$4,000.

The Downtown Park was home to twelve sculptures, only slightly half the number of works from the norm. More would have been selected for the park had they had both the quality and durability necessary. It is possible that the theme worked to narrow down the number of qualifying works, though it could also be that the market for durable work is shrinking. Because the works were kept on the east side of the park, which traditionally has been the safer side, there were no incidents of vandalism.

Ms. Byrne said the process of planning a contract with ArtTech turned out to be more challenging than the actual installations. Atomic Art installers, who focused on the indoor and outdoor work at City Hall, were easy to work with and did an excellent job. They were very good at coming up with solutions for the more challenging installations.

Commissioner Ptacek suggested that for the next exhibition consideration should be given to siting some pieces along the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe right-of-way. Commissioner Donkin said the right-of-way could be a good place to site permanent art.

Ms. Benzikry-Stern said by incorporating new technologies it was possible to increase the overall visibility of the show and to strengthen connections with community groups. The teen project incorporated a new audience in conjunction with Ground Zero, four local schools, the geocaching community, and the community at large. A total of 203 of the travel bugs were made, and 175 of them were launched. About 113 of the bugs left the caches. The furthest one traveled was to Alaska and back to City Hall.

Commissioner Tremblay suggested gifting some of the left-over travel bugs to the Bellevue Schools Foundation as a gesture acknowledging their support. Ms. Benzikry-Stern said she would be contacting all the teachers to let them know which of their student's bugs did return and ask them if their students want to retrieve the bugs for their personal ownership or if they would prefer to re-launch them.

Ms. Byrne said the geocaching aspect drew additional media attention to the exhibition.

Ms. Benzikry-Stern said a lecture at the Bellevue library put the exhibition into the context of environmental art. The presentation was very good but the attendance was very low.

Commissioner Donkin said he really enjoyed the audio guides offered via cell phone. He said it was very much like being at an art gallery where it is possible to hear some narrative about each piece.

Commissioner Donkin suggested that the Bellevue Sculpture Exhibition web site should be kept operational year round. He said he would like to see it include promotion for the 2010 exhibition, including application materials. Ms. Byrne said the site certainly could seek contact information from artists so they can be notified when the call for entries is ready.

Ms. Byrne said in the past no surveys have been conducted to determine community awareness of and attitudes towards the exhibition. This year two different kinds of surveys were undertaken to get two different kinds of data. A 4-question telephone survey of Bellevue residents, statistically valid, was planned for before and after the exhibition to determine whether outreach efforts were making any impact. This year prior to the exhibition's opening media push 49 percent of respondents had either heard of or attended the exhibition. The "after" results will be reported at December's meeting.

While the exhibition was in progress, another surveyor conducted intercept surveys to delve into attitudes and responses towards the exhibition. Preliminary information will also be ready at the December meeting. Ultimately, the resulting information will be shaped into a sound and picture presentation.

## B. 2009 – 2010 Work Plan

Ms. Byrne called the commissioners' attention to a chart showing the status of projects in the 2007-2008 work plan.

Chair Finley commented that the Commission has typically put on the Bellevue Sculpture Exhibition every two years. The event requires a lot of resources, but it cannot be said for sure that the desired audience is being reached. She offered the suggestion that resources may be better used on commissioning permanent sculptures to add to the city's collection, especially large, dramatic pieces the city may not otherwise have the budget for. She added that there is the art walk for which no sculptures beyond the wayfinding markers have yet been commissioned.

Commissioner Shepherd asked what process should be undertaken to make what will be significant decisions about continuing the exhibition. She commented that the Commission has invested in continuing the exhibition because it was determined it was meeting the

desired goal. She said she was not opposed to reevaluating the question, but wanted to know what forum would be used to get the arms of the Commission around the issues and coming to a conclusion.

Commissioner Holder said some of the answer will become clear when the second exhibition survey data is in hand.

Commissioner Ptacek said the current economic climate may cause some projects to be put on hold, but they will eventually reemerge. Bellevue is emerging as an arts city. There should be some way to assess which has the bigger impact, bringing art into the community and exposing people to it, or planting art throughout the community.

Commissioner Tremblay suggested it is a matter of creating cultural assets and deciding what defines them. To a large degree education is the ultimate key. She said she would like to see a pie chart created depicting the city's investments in public art. Large works of public art certainly have a particular draw, but integrated art can be just as meaningful. The city should act to create those opportunities, or at least put itself in a position of being able to respond to such opportunities as they arise.

Commissioner Ptacek said rather than seeking to install temporary works it might be time to focus on the planning work. Chair Finley agreed; she said she has the feeling opportunities will present themselves and the city needs to be ready to respond when they do.

Commissioner Donkin noted that he has always been in favor of significant, large-scale pieces, especially in the downtown area. He noted that the \$350,000 annual public art project budget is calculated on a seven-year period. It is possible the Commission could draw down more money at one time if there were a reason to do so. Given that, if the right opportunity comes along the city will have the wherewithal to address it. The current Downtown Park master plan includes a significant piece in the form of a water feature.

The Commission asked Ms. Byrne to put together a work plan focused on the steps that will need to be taken and the meetings needed in order to be fully ready to take on opportunities as they arise, including in Downtown Park, the gateways and the art walk.

V. COMMISSION QUICK BUSINESS – None

VI. REPORTS

A. Commissioner Reports

1. Budget Request

Commissioner Ptacek reported he attended the City Council meeting on November 3 to address the Commission's recommendation for the city to set aside \$300,000 for the TEN20 Theatre project as a way to keep the project alive. He said he made the point that the black box theater fits in with the *Cultural Compass* and with the Downtown plan. There were Council members that were genuinely interested. Council member Lee asked if there would also need to be a subsidy for the operation of the theater, but absent specific numbers none were shared. Some on the Council are upset to some degree that the developer promised to deliver something that has turned out to be nothing more than a shell, but there does appear to be some support for keeping the project alive.

Commissioner Tremblay noted that Hanover, the company that now owns the TEN20 building, focuses on apartment buildings with a luxury experience. She suggested that a black box theater fits perfectly with that model.

Ms. Byrne suggested that since the economy has changed so much since last May when the Commission first spoke with Council about its budget recommendations, the Commission should prioritize its recommendations, with the most important at the top of the list.

Chair Finley said none of the five budget requests forwarded to the Council appear to have much Council support, with the possible exception of the LTE conversion. The requests are to increase the funding for EAP and special projects; funding to implement Cultural Compass initiatives; funding for the LTE; and the two issues involving TEN20. Only the LTE conversion was included in the City Manager's budget proposal.

Commissioner Ptacek said he would put at the top of the list the \$25,000 in operating funds for the Cultural Compass and the \$300,000 in capital funds for the TEN20 project. There was consensus in favor taking that approach. It was agreed that at the public hearing Chair Finley should give the wrap-up to the City Council.

## 2. Seattle Arts District Event

Commissioner Tremblay reported on a gathering she attended in the Central district. The event was an informal opportunity to explore ways arts practitioners can be valuable, effective partners in community development, including its cultural layer. The people were asked to indicate on a map their location of their favorite cultural places and some Bellevue places were identified. She said the project grew out of the Creative Conversations initiative that Americans for the Arts launched about two years ago.

Ms. Benzikry-Stern said over 80 people attended the event which was convened by the Arts Leadership Lab. The group provides programming and events fostering professional development in arts leadership. This event focused primarily on encouraging informal conversations on the topic. In addition, a formal survey was taken.

## 3. Meydenbauer Park Master Plan Update

Chair Finley said there was a recent public meeting and steering committee meeting. The process has slowed somewhat waiting for the results of the Environmental Impact Statement that will take about six months.

### B. Staff Reports

1. TEN20 Theatre Update
2. Project Status Report

## VII. INFORMATION AND UPCOMING EVENTS

### A. Written Correspondence – None

### B. For Your Information – As Noted

1. Upcoming Agenda Items
2. Calendar
3. CIP Public Art Program Commitments Update

## VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Finley adjourned the meeting at 6:02 p.m.