

BELLEVUE ARTS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES

March 3, 2009
4:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E -109

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Shepherd, Tremblay

STAFF PRESENT: Mary Pat Byrne, Department of Planning and Community Development

OTHERS PRESENT: Van Diep, Abigail Guay, John Su Development; Shelley Brittingham, assistant director, Parks & Community Services

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting began without a quorum at 4:17 p.m. Chairperson Finley presided. All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Kiselev, who arrived at 4:20 p.m.; Commissioner Ptacek, who arrived at 4:22 p.m.; Commissioner Donkin, who arrived at 4:31 p.m.; and Commissioners Shepherd and Tremblay, both of whom were excused.

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

A. Approval of Agenda

Because a quorum was not present, the agenda was not approved.

B. Approval of Minutes

Because a quorum was not present, the minutes were not approved.

III. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

IV. ACTION ITEMS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Update on John Su's 989 Elements Too Project

Arts Specialist Mary Pat Byrne reported that Van Diep, Abigail Guay, Lynn Terpstra and Linda Abe from Su Development provided the Eastside Arts Coalition with an update on arts opportunities planned for the second phase of the 989 Elements project, which they are calling Elements Too. They reported that they have an ambitious cultural program planned for the development.

Ms. Diep said the main goal of the Elements Too project is to challenge the notion that the arts can't be a viable industry in Bellevue. The project will serve to promote the arts and hopefully help to create an arts district in the downtown. Mr. Su's approach is to seed activities that are entrepreneurial; he is not seeking to create non-profit organizations and will be focusing his efforts in the arts arena from a for-profit point of view. His plan is to help groups start up projects and then step back to allow the projects to become self-sustaining.

Ms. Diep said the main initiatives under consideration are based on the Elements project and the Ashwood neighborhood. The Open Satellite initiative, started and sustained by Mr. Su, is located in Phase I of the Elements project. The Ashwood neighborhood is developing into a full cultural district, with Open Satellite, PACE, the black box theater, the Bellevue library, the Rosalie Whyel Museum of Doll Art, Ashwood Park and the plaza. The Elements Too project includes a large public space called the plaza element. It will include a reflection pool, a built-in stream, plenty of landscaping, tables and chairs, and restaurants. The pool will be able to be drained and used as a stage for outdoor concerts and other performances, all of which will help make the space come alive.

Su Development is currently studying the feasibility for developing a ceramic studio, warm glass studio, and a woodworking shop, all of which will serve as learning centers.

Chair Finley asked who will be coming to Elements Too and who will pay for all the activities they envision. Ms. Diep said the idea is that if the facility it built the people will come. Mr. Su intends to underwrite the startup costs, but he wants to see the various entities become self-sustaining over time. People will pay to use the facilities, and there will be income from the sale of products.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Kiselev, Abigail Guay with Su Development said Open Satellite was co-founded by Mr. Su and two artist/architects. She said ideally for a space to be completely sustainable, it would not be a residency. The project started by offering residencies which have made the program valuable, but they have also made the program very hard to sustain. Income is being generated through space rental and public programming. An example of a non-profit becoming a sustainable business is Artech which has morphed from non-profit to a successful and profitable entity.

Commissioner Holder cautioned against ruling out the non-profit concept altogether. While many think non-profits do not make money, the fact is they do and they should; the difference is the board members of non-profits are not shareholders. People are more inclined to donate to non-profit organizations for the tax benefits. Non-profits can be very successful. Ms. Guay said Mr. Su is providing the opportunity to try the various approaches to making money without being a non-profit. Nothing has been ruled out.

Ms. Byrne said the learning center model closely mirrors Bellevue Community College's continuing education program, which does pay for itself. Their success in part has been predicated on their ability to offer different classes based on student interests, and to change offerings as student interests changed. Ms. Diep said she has looked at that model and the demands on the student side. She said the Elements project is located in the downtown brings in financial challenges that facilities in outlying areas do not face.

Commissioner Ptacek said the idea of having a learning center in the downtown focused on artistic endeavors is very exciting, and as a downtown resident he likely would participate in it. He suggested the potential audience will include people who are not part of the art community and who will not be part of creating the synergy the center will need. Ms. Diep said Cornish was brought to the South Lake Union area expressly to help turn the area into

an arts district, but even though Cornish is there an arts district has not developed. The Elements project will be able to draw on the tech workers in downtown Bellevue, including the Xbox games people and the Microsoft marketing people, along with multimedia web developers. Commissioner Ptacek said the Bel-Red corridor is nearly within walking distance of the Ashwood district and it has an inventory of artistic places. The Commission is clearly on the record in favor of developing an arts district; the focus of late has been on the Bel-Red area, but having one in the downtown would be wonderful.

Chair Finley said she hopes that as the Elements project moves forward it will seek to be inclusive of the facilities and programs and potential user groups that already exist in the Ashwood district, such as the library, the nearby senior housing residences, and families.

I. CALL TO ORDER

A quorum having been reached, Chair Finley called the meeting to order at 4:52 p.m.

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

A. Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda as printed was made by Commissioner Donkin. Second was by Commissioner Ptacek and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the February 3, 2009, meeting minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Donkin. Second was by Commissioner Kiselev and the motion carried unanimously.

IV. ACTION ITEMS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS (continued)

B. Telephone Survey for 2009 Bellevue Sculpture Exhibition

Ms. Byrne said she included in the packet the top line numbers from telephone surveys taken in June and November. For each of two surveys, 400 Bellevue registered voters, randomly telephoned, responded which gives a high level of confidence with the numbers.

Ms. Byrne reviewed with the Commissioners the numbers included in the report. Commissioner Donkin said he was disappointed to learn that 52 percent had never heard of the exhibition. Ms. Byrne said 48 percent had heard of the exhibition, which is impressive for a small-scale event.

Commissioner Kiselev disagreed with the comment that the event is small scale. She pointed out that significant resources are invested in the exhibition. She suggested, however, that rather than being discouraged the Commissioners should start thinking about how to better market the event.

Commissioner Donkin said that of all the different kinds of arts things in the community and region that people enjoy, sculpture is a fairly small piece. He said it is possible that the advertising campaign reached some people but not others who really would have liked to know about the event. He suggested taking another look at the marketing tools from the perspective of making sure they are hitting the market the Commission wants to hit.

Commissioner Kiselev said she is a big supporter of using banners to advertise events. She said they simply work the best. The idea is not to catch the eye of only those in the arts community but everyone in the community. The Commission should step back and review the purpose for having the exhibition and the goals to be achieved. Ms. Byrne said the planning committee reviews and sets goals and objectives for each exhibition. The chief goal since the beginning of the exhibition has been to expand people's ideas about what sculpture can be and to provide a great sculpture experience. Commissioner Kiselev said that the reason behind trying to educate the people should be made clearer.

Chair Finley pointed out that the Cultural Compass clearly spells out the desire of Bellevue to be the cultural hub of the Eastside. In order to accomplish that goal, the Commission has looked at various ways to reach out and to be unique in how to do and show art. The Bellevue Sculpture Exhibition is one way to do that.

Answering a question asked by Chair Finley, Ms. Byrne said the Bellevue Sculpture Exhibition first came about after the public art program's funding changed in 1987. Two major art projects, *Salmon Woman and Raven* and *Garden of Alternatives*, were undertaken and both generated some strong public reactions that were not completely positive. The Commission concluded that the people in the community were not used to seeing sculpture in public places in their own city, and created the exhibition as a less threatening experience given that it comes in and then goes out. The idea was to encourage people to be more supportive of sculpture by seeing more of it in more variety.

Commissioner Ptacek said the survey is interesting in that it seems to imply the exhibition is not having much of an impact on people. He suggested that having permanent pieces that become a part of the fabric of the community could ultimately have more of an impact over time. Works like *Waiting for the Interurban* in Seattle have been warmly received in Seattle and have become part of the fabric of the community. He said taking a similar approach in Bellevue might yield better results. The Bellevue Sculpture Exhibition may just be too ephemeral for people to grasp in that it is here and then it is gone.

Commissioner Donkin disagreed. He said everyone in his circle of friends attends and enjoys the sculpture exhibition. Clearly there is a segment of the community that values the event and which comes away with a very good feeling toward the city. He agreed that permanent art yields a sense of place and community, but said that is different from what the purpose of the exhibition is. There is a place in Bellevue for the exhibition, and it will continue to have an impact on many in the community. Just knowing whether or not the community has heard of the event is not the best measure of success.

Commissioner Holder said she loves the Bellevue Sculpture Exhibition. She noted that a large number of the respondents to the survey were seniors, and that only about 16% of the respondents actually attended the exhibition. It could be assumed that the art in the exhibition has not been of a high enough caliber to serve as a big draw, or that the advertising campaign was not a success.

Commissioner Ptacek suggested that in order to really reach the masses with advertising a very large budget is needed. The small amount spent by the city represents a good effort but cannot be expected to double or triple the attendance.

Commissioner Holder agreed that the event could use some improvement. Ms. Byrne suggested the Commission should have a clear idea of what good attendance numbers are for such an event. She said it probably is not realistic to expect 90 percent of the community to know about the event.

Commissioner Kiselev disagreed. She said Bellevue is a small city and it should be possible for 75 or 80 percent of the residents to know about the exhibition. Ms. Byrne said that would take far more advertising dollars.

Commissioner Ptacek said he did not know exactly what the outcome of the exhibition should be, but he pointed out that the event takes place in the community that wants to be the cultural center of the Eastside. The numbers indicated by the surveys are probably not where they should be.

Chair Finley pointed out that Bellevue is a fluid and changing community, and the reasons for holding the exhibition that were valid at one time may no longer be the reasons for continuing the event.

Commissioner Kiselev suggested that while the advertising budget is not huge, it is significant. She said there should be some rethinking about how those dollars are spent. Commissioner Donkin agreed. New ways should be found to make the event known. One way to do it would be to get the community collaboratively involved, especially the youth; someone could be hired to develop a curriculum to be presented in the school just before the exhibition kicks off.

Chair Finley pointed out that the most recent Bellevue Sculpture Exhibition involved students from every single high school in the city in the geocaching element. It is therefore very disappointing that the survey results were not more positive. Commissioner Kiselev pointed out that teens are very focused on their own interests and works. While many were involved, it is quite possible that all they were interested in was what they were directly involved in.

Commissioner Kiselev said diversity involves more than just cultural and national endeavors; it also includes artistic and social endeavors. If the Commission could work into all those elements of society, the community will come to accept the arts and will value and respect them.

Commissioner Ptacek said the city of Burien recently made a bit of splash recently when they installed several pieces of the Burning Man exhibit. He said he would like to know what kind of reaction is being generated in that community.

Commissioner Holder said one thing that would attract more to the exhibition would be to have higher quality pieces.

Commissioner Ptacek suggested the options open to the Commission are to try and make the exhibition better, or take the money and go in an entirely different direction.

Chair Finley said that the issue has come up before and should be given a full discussion at a future meeting when all Commissioners will be present. A decision will need to be made before long because it will soon be time to start planning for the next event.

Commissioner Kiselev said whatever the Commission decides to do it should be done in a business-like manner that will prove to be profitable as well as attractive and interesting.

Commissioner Donkin suggested that the website could be beefed up a bit to include a full page just for the sculpture exhibition. Commissioner Kiselev said additionally the website should talk about the various benefits of the arts. Ms. Byrne said there are many pages on the website devoted to the exhibition. Pages include images of the art, pages on the teen project, opportunities for people to comment, and many other features.

Commissioner Ptacek commented that at the very least the survey results dictate that the Commission should have a serious discussion about direction.

C. Funding Cycle: New Schedule

Ms. Byrne said the current funding cycle calendar is not getting the decisions to applicants until April or later. In 2008 because there were questions and issues to be addressed, applicants could not be notified until July. Clearly, the process must begin much earlier. There was consensus among the commissioners that the funding cycle should start soon enough so that decisions for 2010 can be made by December of 2009.

V. COMMISSION QUICK BUSINESS – None

VI. REPORTS

A. Commissioner Reports

1. Bridle Trails

Commissioner Holder said the nine artists who submitted proposals were initially narrowed to four. After interviewing the four artists the panel was able to reduce the number to three, but could not reach consensus on a final choice. The group concluded that it should step back and develop a deeper profile of the neighborhood describing what the neighborhood is and what it means to the residents, give this information to the final three artists and ask them to respond in writing to some additional questions. Commissioner Holder said she thought the exercise of having residents on neighborhood panels complete a similar exercise would be a helpful practice on future neighborhood public art projects. At its next meeting the panel will review the artists' responses and select one artist to recommend for the project.

B. Staff Reports – None

VII. INFORMATION AND UPCOMING EVENTS

A. Written Correspondence – None

B. For Your Information – As Noted

1. Minutes, approved as corrected 1-20-09
2. Upcoming Agenda Items
3. Calendar
4. CIP Public Art Program Commitments Update

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Finley adjourned the meeting at 5:45 p.m.