

BELLEVUE ARTS COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING  
MINUTES  
(Corrected as approved 11-1-11)

October 4, 2011  
4:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
Room 1E -109

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Ptacek, Commissioners Finley, Jackson, Kiselev, Liljeblad, ~~Smith~~, Tremblay

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Smith

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Mary Ellen Hundley, Kevin Harkins, Ballet Bellevue

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:07 p.m. by Chairperson Ptacek who presided. All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Tremblay, who arrived at 4:19 p.m., and Commissioner Smith, who was excused.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

A. Approval of Agenda

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

B. Approval of Minutes

**Motion to approve the September 6, 2011, minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Kiselev. Second was by Commissioner Finley and the motion carried unanimously.**

3. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. ACTION ITEMS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Presentation Ballet Bellevue

Ms. Byrne introduced executive director Mary Ellen Hundley and technical director Kevin Harkins of Ballet Bellevue, a long-time arts organization in the community. She noted that during their interview for Eastside Arts Partnerships last spring, their representative said that Ballet Bellevue had entered into a program with Springboard to build capacity and conduct leadership succession planning. She invited the Ballet Bellevue representatives to describe their experience with the program and outline how it has affected plans for the future of the organization.

Introducing himself, Mr. Harkins said by profession he is documentary film maker and has for the past 14 years worked out of New York. He said he grew up in Bellevue and has for more than 20

years been working with Ballet Bellevue. He said he has also been working with the Seattle Parks Department, most recently on the renovations to the Langston Youth Theatre.

Ms. Hundley said the Ballet Arts Center School has a different history from Ballet Bellevue as a company. The school was founded in Bellevue in the early 1960s as a private business by Carolyn Gracey Greer. When Ms. Greer passed away, the school became a non-profit in the hope of receiving sponsor support. In June 1997, Bellevue's new ballet company, Ballet Bellevue, was invited to steward the school. Ballet Bellevue was at the time already a non-profit in its own right. In the interest of management survival, as well as distinction of vision, the two non-profits have remained separate.

Springboard was originally created to help large non-profit organizations manage the difficult challenges they face. Pleased with their success, Springboard began to include smaller non-profit organizations. Between March and September 2011, Springboard assigned two consultants to Ballet Bellevue: Christina Bass, a project management expert, and Steven Franz, a finance expert. Organizations that choose to work with Springboard must provide a three-person team, with two of them board members; Ms. Hundley said the Ballet Bellevue team consisted of herself, Chi Wang, a board member, and Katarina Perchaska, a member of the fundraising committee.

Ms. Hundley said the plan initially was for Ms. Bass and Mr. Franz to spend two half-days with her focused on the organizational and financial issues of Ballet Bellevue. The primary organizational aims were to identify a succession plan for the director position, and to bring the financial accounting into the modern age and off of a paper ledger. Ms. Bass determined that it would be important to work on the Ballet Arts Center as well as Ballet Bellevue given the amount of attention the school needs from the director, so the consultant took on the school as an extra project. It was quickly learned that the picture was more complicated than expected so two full days, plus another half day, were scheduled instead of the original two half-days. Ms. Hundley said in the end the consultant created a tool that identifies all tasks and who has control of them, and a five-year plan for how the school and the company could continue to operate with her phased out. Ms. Bass also created a chart of tasks to be addressed between July 2011 and July 2012, with each task color-coded to indicate relative priority.

Mr. Franz was not able to complete his meetings with the organization. However, through him the organization was able to connect with Duane Langdon of 501 Commons who is set to begin the conversion from paper ledger to Quickbooks, and to create a plan for creating financial reports.

Meetings have also been held with attorney Dana Reid whose specialty is non-profit finances.

Some of the identified tasks have already been addressed. A receptionist has been hired for the studio, and an associate director has been hired for the school, and next year will become the director. A custodian and part-time bookkeeper have also been hired, and three new artistic leaders are working with the company as guest directors and production associates. Board members from both the school and the company have been assigned to monitor progress through the plan.

Chair Ptacek asked about condition the facility itself. Ms. Hundley said the building is quite old. It is owned by the city and is rented on a month-to-month basis. It is the only studio left in the downtown area and perfectly designed to accommodate the school functions. Puget Sound Energy redid the lighting system as part of an energy saving program. The city pays the electric bill as part of the rental agreement.

Ms. Hundley said the popularity of the school means it now operates seven days a week year round, and it has become necessary to turn away students. The school could use a larger facility.

Ms. Byrne said that the city has for some time planned to tear down the building when the Downtown Park is redeveloped. She asked if the organization has a strategy in place for relocating when that happens. Ms. Hundley said a number of parents are concerned and have formed an ad-hoc committee to address the issue. The desire is to continue operating in the downtown.

Commissioner Kiselev asked about the organization's fundraising strategies. Ms. Hundley said fundraising and marketing represent a very large gap in the organization, and they are at the top of the high-priority items. The organization has not been effective at fundraising; it has received grants in the past, but those have generally been cut in half across the board. Grants and matches have been received from corporations as well, and they continue to be an important part of the overall funding scheme. Ticket sales fall into that category as well. Productions typically cost about \$50,000, so ticket sales are vitally important. The need to develop a serious fundraising program is clear and paramount.

Commissioner Jackson asked how seats in the 425-seat theater are sold for a given show. Ms. Hundley said it depends on the show. Shows with a story ballet typically sell out, but contemporary shows that are less popular will sell only half the seats or so.

Commissioner Liljeblad asked Ms. Hundley if there are any heirs apparent to take over her position. She replied that the young woman hired as associate director of the school, and who next year will become the director, was a former student and was recruited. However, she does not want to be the director of the overall organization.

#### B. Cultural Compass Limited Update

Ms. Byrne called attention to the matrix in the packet that contained the information generated from the workshop on September 9. She also noted that detailed minutes from the workshop were included in the packet. The Commissioners were asked to review the matrix and the minutes and deepen the inquiry into what kinds of questions should be asked. It is also time to begin talking to the stakeholders. She suggested that the subcommittee should reconvene to focus on the work plan.

Planning Director Dan Stroh apologized for not having been able to attend the workshop but noted that he had reviewed the minutes and talked with Ms. Byrne to get up to speed.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Jackson, Ms. Byrne said one of the strategies in the Cultural Compass is to inventory the kinds of resources for technical assistance that are available. Certainly Springboard fits the category. One question that might be asked of the arts groups is what other similar resources are available.

Chair Ptacek noted that a number of questions came up during the workshop about facilities and venues. He suggested the Commission should think about asking questions on that topic.

Commissioner Finley said places like Ballard have underutilized buildings that can be turned into useful spaces for artistic purposes. She said she was not aware of such options in Bellevue. Mr. Stroh said he recently went to Factoria Mall to see the exhibit of Bel-Red paintings by Brian Forrest. He said the mall management said they had never thought about using space for exhibits. However they were pleased with how the exhibition looks and excited to see the reaction of the public. Now they are thinking about more opportunities for exhibits. There are currently a large number of retail spaces that are vacant, though making them available for performing arts may take some doing.

Ms. Byrne said Shunpike is currently running a storefront arts program, and they have worked out the issues of dealing with utilities, insurance, and other particulars. They have been operating in

Seattle and would like to expand to the Eastside. There are costs that someone must cover, but it would at least be interesting to talk with them to talk about potential solutions.

Chair Ptacek asked if it would be possible to establish a community-based organization to pool resources and make them available to facilitating the utilization of spaces in the community. Ms. Byrne suggested the issue would be a good one to add to the list of questions.

Commissioner Tremblay said the Bellevue Youth Theatre currently is focused on its capital campaign but in looking to the future they see themselves implementing that very model. Commissioner Liljeblad commented that a group already moving in that direction would be the logical body to focus on expanding it for a larger audience.

Commissioner Finley asked if the city has ever invited members of the business community to sit in on the Eastside Arts Partnerships interviews. She suggested this involvement could lead to contributions for arts groups. Ms. Byrne said that has not been done, and could be. Responding to a question from Commissioner Finley, Ms. Byrne said contributions made to the city for specific projects can qualify as tax deductible contributions.

Commissioner Jackson said care would need to be taken to make sure the city is not competing for funding with the groups they support, and that any funding received would not be used simply to replace city funds. She added that making retail space available for short periods of time would open the door to many for not much outlay.

Commissioner Finley said one big advantage for donors is that the city would invest in the effort to vet the groups first.

Chair Ptacek asked if it would be useful for the Commission or the city to sponsor a forum for architects and designers focused on how to take different spaces and utilize them for various arts-related activities. Commissioner Jackson said she liked the idea and suggested a presentation could be put together and given to groups like Rotary as a way to spread the message.

Mr. Stroh said there is a lot of design experience behind the designing of permanent facilities to be used over time. There are also different models for how to address spaces for temporary use by both visual arts and performing arts with just a modest investment. For instance, in Newport Hills the owner of the neighborhood business mall has no interest in major redevelopment for a period of time which means opportunities may exist for short-term arrangements with arts groups. There is a great need for incubator performing arts spaces; they are needed to sustain and grow organizations. It rarely matters that such spaces are constantly moving. The questions underlying the Cultural Compass include what unique role should the city play and what should the city bring to the table to move the ball forward.

Commissioner Kiselev said the Commission should be looking for ways to help make arts groups successful in every way. They need low-cost facilities to start out in. As they grow they will be able to afford more expensive space and will become true contributors to the local economy.

With regard to public art, Commissioner Finley said there are still some prime places in the downtown where art works could be sited, including at NE 10<sup>th</sup> Street and 108<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE.

Chair Ptacek reminded the Commission that former Commissioner Donkin advocated strongly for siting a significant and place-identifying work in the downtown. The notion of an iconic and memorable element goes way back to the original downtown plan. Mr. Stroh said the idea has been talked about often but as yet has not been realized.

Commissioner Tremblay pointed out that this place is famous for incubating ideas, especially in the area of technology. She said she would like to see some wayfinding that is socially driven, and out-of-the-box thinkers brought in to bring fresh ideas for public projects. When that happens Bellevue will become a Northwest “memorable place.” Part of the Commission’s role should be to connect what is happening in industry with what is happening in the art world.

Chair Ptacek suggested the question to ask is how to find a public art expression using technological developments.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Finley, Ms. Byrne said from time to time the city is offered artworks as gifts or loans. The challenge, however, is that such works are difficult to site. Commissioning art works much better because the result is a work that fits the intended site.

Chair Ptacek said the question is how can the city tap into private collections that might include art works looking for a public home.

Commissioner Finley pointed out that once construction of the art walk gets under way, there will be a real need for artworks to be placed along it. She said there may be private collectors who would like to see some of their works included. Commissioner Kiselev agreed but cautioned that taking that approach could result in a mishmash of works rather than something cohesive and in the spirit of the city.

Commissioner Liljeblad commented that it is likely there are a lot of artists who are not commercially viable enough to purchase a booth at one of the arts fairs to exhibit their works. There may be opportunities to use vacant and underutilized spaces for competitions and the like where amateur artists could show their work.

Commissioner Jackson said she would like to see the stakeholders asked how the city can get public art that will interest people in art. If the target audience does not “get it,” whatever was spent on the work was a waste of money. Recently there was a newspaper article about an artwork in a city that was symbolic of the city and in keeping with the surroundings, yet the community hated it and in the end the city had to pay someone to remove it and in the process lost \$150,000. One purpose of public art is to encourage those who are not knowledgeable about art to engage with art and thereby gain an appreciation for it.

Commissioner Kiselev said it is not the quality of art that makes it accessible but rather when art speaks to a person and garners admiration. The question is how to reach out to that portion of the public who do not consider themselves fans of art, primarily because they have not been exposed to it.

Commissioner Tremblay said it is difficult to define what public art is because it has changed so much over the years. The community should be asked what they deem public art to be. Chair Ptacek said one way to do that would be to ask the public to show pictures of works that they consider public art. Commissioner Tremblay agreed but pointed out that the element of public art that is most difficult to define is the sublime experience that occurs when art takes on a life of its own. Setting the bar too low disallows the controversial and the unexpected, which are the things that create dialog.

Commissioner Kiselev said she would like to see a blog created as a way of determining how the community perceives public art. By allowing members of the public to share their thoughts, the public can be more engaged in furthering the conversation.

Turning to the topic of diversity, Chair Ptacek reminded the Commissioners that a diverse group of women meets regularly in the Crossroads area. He said one question that needs to be asked is what

other informal groups from diverse cultures are meeting in the city. Ms. Byrne said one of the strategies of the Cultural Compass is to establish an inventory of cultural heritage festivals and events that occur in the city, to identify any gaps, and then to carve out a way to fill them. Another strategy is to put together presentations on immigrants who are in transition. The Eastside Heritage group is engaged in that process, so perhaps the next step would be to gather the data collected and incorporate it into a road show that could be taken around to schools, civic groups, and to whomever might want to hear about it.

Commissioner Liljeblad noted that diversity extends beyond cultural differences to include different age groups, different economic levels and more.

Commissioner Kiselev said Circle of Friends has funded a pilot project that will be launched soon. The project will address diversity issues and ethnic literacy. Funding is very limited, so only time will tell if the pilot project will have a future.

Chair Ptacek said he serves on the board of the School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle University. He said the organization is all about inter-religious interaction. Because diversity is often associated with different religions, something could be done to explore the artistic heritage of different religions.

Commissioner Jackson said she recently learned about a series of films that focus on the food traditions of various religions. While the focus is on food, the results often are intercultural and inter-religious understanding.

Commissioner Jackson said another question to ask is how to pull all of this into the mainstream. The whole city should benefit, not just those in Crossroads.

Commissioner Kiselev connecting the arts and religion could achieve two goals: appealing to people who would not consider themselves arts gurus, and religion serving as the common ground between various ethnic groups.

C. "How Else Can We Help?"

Discussion of this item was postponed to a future Commission meeting.

5. COMMISSION QUICK BUSINESS – None

6. REPORTS

A. Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Liljeblad reported that he went to see *The Flimflam Man*, produced by Eastside Lyric Theatre. He said it was a very good production with a diverse cast. The production included dancers from Ballet Bellevue and kids from the school.

Commissioner Tremblay reported that the Detlef Schrempf Foundation has adopted Bellevue Youth Theatre as the beneficiary of the Nordstrom fashion show fundraiser.

Chair Ptacek said he recently had the opportunity to have lunch with Department of Planning and Community Development director Chris Salomone. He said he came away with the belief that the arts have a real supporter in him.

B. Staff Reports

Ms. Byrne reported that the Newport Hills/Lake Heights neighborhood public art project is currently on display for public comment at the Newport Hills Community Church, a central gathering place for those neighborhoods. It will remain on display through October 19. A new webpage has been launched and it allows for the public to offer comments and observations. The same approach is being developed for the Bridle Trails project so it can be moved forward.

The display of Special Projects artist Brian Forrest's works in Factoria Mall represents an excellent new partnership. The display is moving to Vovito, in the Bravern. The people who own the small business are interested in supporting the arts and they want to be seen in the community as arts supporters. The project opens the door to other visual artists.

Ms. Byrne reported that Special Projects artist Cheryl Leo Gwinn has made an agreement with the owners of the Sternco Shopping Center on the corner of NE 20<sup>th</sup> Street and 148<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE to display reproductions of her current artwork in the windows of the now vacant Crossroads Appliances store. Ms. Byrne thought it might be possible for Mr. Forrest will be able to move his works there when Ms. Gwinn's works are removed, which would mean actually displaying the Bel-Red paintings in the Bel-Red corridor. The property owner is happy to have something happening in the storefront until he leases out the space.

Ms. Byrne said Arts Crush is a month-long arts festival that focuses on unusual or behind-the-scenes experiences in the arts. For the last couple of years it has been focused in Seattle, and organizers would like to expand the festival to the Eastside. To that end, Ms Byrne is collaborating with Parks Department staff to broker partnerships between local artists and city community centers.

Ms. Byrne reported that she attended the production of the Seattle Chinese Chorus held at the First Presbyterian Church and funded through the Special Projects program. She said it was very well attended by an enthusiastic audience.

## 7. CORRESPONDENCE, INFORMATION AND UPCOMING EVENTS

- A. Written Correspondence – None
- B. Information – As Noted
  - 1. Projects Timeline September through January
  - 2. Upcoming Agenda Items
  - 3. Commission Committee Chairs and Leads for 2011- 2012
  - 4. Calendar
  - 5. Public Art Program budget update

## 8. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Ptacek adjourned the meeting at 5:59 p.m.