

Mapping Bel-Red's Cultural Future

A Preliminary Plan for Art Site Opportunities
In an Evolving Neighborhood



*Prepared by Works Consulting
July 30, 2010*

*Funded through a Special Projects Grant
City of Bellevue*

“Communities derive nourishment from stories that offer inspiration, empathy, and guidance, that help possibility to bloom.”

Arlene Goldbard, author of

“New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development”

(New Village Press, 2006)

in Public Art Review, Spring/Summer, 2009

BACKGROUND

This preliminary plan places priority on the City of Bellevue's goals outlined in the 2009 Bel-Red Subarea Plan. The Bel-Red Subarea Plan calls for the transformation of a 900-acre light industrial and retail area into a mixed-use, transit-oriented neighborhood. The vision outlined for the Bel-Red Corridor includes the creation of thousands of new jobs and housing units, along with stream restorations and new parks. The Bellevue City Council also identified an arts district in Bel-Red as part of the larger vision for the area. The complete plan for Bel-Red's transformation can be viewed at:

http://www.ci.bellevue.wa.us/bel-red_intro.htm

A quick overview of the plan can be accessed in the project brochure:

http://www.ci.bellevue.wa.us/pdf/PCD/Bel-Red_Brochure_2.pdf

GOALS

In 2009 the Bellevue Arts Commission issued the 2010 Bel-Red Challenge to encourage arts projects to take place within the Bel-Red Corridor. The Commission challenged artists to start creating an arts district today by proposing temporary art projects for anywhere in the Bel-Red area. The goal of this report, "Mapping Bel-Red's Cultural Future" is to provide a foundation for artists, city planners, commercial and cultural partners to work together to increase arts experiences and cultural participation in Bel-Red. For those who do not regularly visit the area, the Bel-Red Corridor is largely unknown and unexplored. "Mapping Bel-Red's Cultural Future" explores and maps the neighborhood and lists the most advantageous and potentially inspiring sites. This report identifies sites with good potential for artists to consider for imagining and presenting art projects and that afford possibilities for the public to access and be engaged by those projects.

Projects that are informed by the findings of this report should spark interest in and awareness of Bel-Red as a cultural district and pave the way for residents to enjoy new cultural offerings in accessible and engaging ways. Imaginative arts offerings in unexpected settings have immense potential to surprise and intrigue the public and help them become engaged in the future of this neighborhood. The public cares more deeply about a neighborhood when arts activities create lively settings in which they might potentially work and live. Once the public becomes aware and engaged, organizational and commercial partners may also envision the possibilities and may be encouraged to make economic investments in the area.

The arts projects this plan aims to facilitate will:

- Focus a transitional neighborhood on its evolution into a new identity, helping to make the area a great place to live, work and play
- Connect residents, transit users, non-profits and businesses through shared experiences that spark the imagination and help individuals visualize a shared future

In creating this preliminary plan we placed priority on artists creating temporary artwork to call attention to planned light rail, transit routes and streets, within the context of the area's "natural infrastructure" of streams and wetlands, as well as existing parks and open space.

BEL-RED AREA CULTURAL OVERVIEW

At this time the Bel-Red area has no cultural identity. A "mixed bag" of light industrial uses, warehouses, large and small commercial businesses, Bel-Red is full of possibilities and challenges. Users of this neighborhood often stop only briefly or pass through the area. Customers and employees go to work or do business. Children and teens play in the park or are driven to and from classes at Pacific Northwest Ballet School. Much of what is going on in Bel-Red is invisible from the large arterials, obscuring what is there but holding promises of uses to unfold in the future.

The intensive planning that is underway for this neighborhood is unseen by its users. Much as the area's future is invisible, the past is also impossible to discern. Traces of the area's indigenous inhabitants as well as its more recent agricultural past are gone. The neighborhood's "natural infrastructure" is difficult to see too, with glimpses of vital watershed streams apparent only spottily throughout the neighborhood.

Arts presentations will offer opportunities for park users, commuters, residents, customers, business owners and employees to experience and imagine what is not visible—the reality of the past, the presence of the natural setting and the possibilities of future. In a landscape that seems disconnected from the natural world and does not appear to be walkable, but has intensive transit planning underway and a network of vital streams, the presentation of artwork has potential to stimulate curiosity and establish a sense of place.

PROCESS

To gather the information and recommendations presented in this report, the following activities were completed:

- Review of the city's plan for future land uses and Bel-Red's role in the city's growth and economic development through 2030
- Meet with city staff regarding Bel-Red transit and growth planning
- Meet with city staff regarding watersheds and wetlands in Bel-Red
- Multiple site visits throughout the Corridor to identify potential sites
- Video and still photography of potential sites
- Walk-through of selected sites
- Develop a temporary website for information sharing and updates regarding art projects in Bel-Red. (Not live. This website template might be used for future projects.)
- Develop informational flyer for mailing and/or delivery to key potential sites. (Not distributed. This flyer template might be used for future projects.)
- Meet with an artist to discuss preliminary findings about potential sites
- Finalize selected sites and final report

OPPORTUNITIES

After review of data gathered throughout the process outlined above we offer the following recommendations and information:

Bel-Red is appropriate for visual, literary, performing, film, digital, sound, combined media, installation and interactive projects. However, due to the changing nature of the built environment, the fragility of the natural landscape, and potential budget constraints, projects should be temporary in nature.

Emphasis should be placed on projects that do not adversely affect the already compromised natural features of the environment.

It is important to imbue art projects with the element of surprise to create intrigue and excitement about the past and the future of Bel-Red.

Projects must engage Bellevue residents of all ages. Median age in Bellevue is 36 years. To engage multiple generations it is critical that artists consider methods to utilize social networking, and/or to make work that is mobile and/or interactive.

To engage a variety of audiences, artists must consider Bellevue's racial and cultural diversity. Approximately 30 percent of residents were born outside the United States. Approximately 35 % of residents identify themselves as other than Caucasian. Eighty-one different languages are spoken by children in Bellevue public schools.

SITE RECOMMENDATIONS

Sites identified as most favorable for this project are listed below in prioritized order. We chose sites that offered a high degree of imaginative possibilities but that also had potential partners nearby and that were well positioned geographically. Access to various sites may be limited. Artists will need to investigate access issues and gain permission to use sites.

City plans includes day lighting some of Bel-Red's streams which contain vital fish habitat. The first three sites include important watershed streams of Goff Creek, Kelsey Creek and the West Tributary.

West Tributary Wetland

Directly to the south of the King County Metro Transit Bellevue Base at 1790 124th AV NE, Bellevue, WA. This extensive wetland includes habitat for native plants, salmon, ducks, beaver and other wildlife. It is rimmed with businesses including Metro Transit, Allied Waste and Coca-Cola Inc.

Kelsey Creek Tributary

Day lighted on the east side of 140th AV NE, Bellevue, WA, between NE 20th ST and Bel-Red RD. This stream has been made visible between the play area of Highland Park and 140th AV NE and behind the Noble Court Restaurant at 1644 140th AV NE. Upstream the creek runs underground. Downstream, behind the old gas station at 140th AV NE and Bel-Red RD, the stream is compromised with debris on the bank.

Goff Creek

Day lighted on the west side of 132th AV NE between NE 20th ST and NE 16th ST, Bellevue, WA. Goff Creek flows through north-central Bellevue, passing under SR 520 and Northup Way en route to the West Tributary of Kelsey Creek. Heavy commercial and residential development surrounds the creek and contributes surface flow. The significant volume of water in Goff Creek provides abundant opportunities for fish use. Cutthroat trout are known to inhabit

the entire length of Goff Creek, and sockeye salmon have been reported in the first downstream segment.

Highland Park

Located at 14224 Bel-Red RD, Bellevue, WA. There are arts activities taking place at Highland Community Park, but there is potential for more. There are many sites for audiences to gather and for artists to present their work. This park is used by people of all ages, and has green space all around it, providing a “ready made” setting for arts experiences in “unusual and unexpected places”.

- *Traffic Circle* –This site lends an easy opportunity for small surprising and temporary presentations. The location as a terminus/circle can spark imagination and provides opportunities for somewhat intimate artworks that can be seen by many from the adjacent Skate Park and Fields.
- *Skate Park* – Among the many “already made” sites in Bel-Red, the structure of the skate park offers an unusual stage opportunity. The current users of the skate park are mostly teens who could likely benefit by working with an artist to create artwork as well as to have art in their space.
- *Fields*– This site is spacious and lush with green grass. Between scheduled activities, the fields are empty. The fields are visible from the skate park. This provides a great opportunity for a performance or temporary installation. Because the fields and skate park are well utilized, the location is recognized and easy to find.
- *Wall Adjacent to Skate Park* – Not immediately noticeable, this is a large and long white wall on the building above the skate park. It is visible from as far away as the skate park and the fields. This provides an excellent site for projections and temporary artwork.

Pacific Northwest Ballet School

Located at 13440 NE 16th ST, Bellevue, WA. This site is well known and well used by performers and their audiences. The City’s plan contains a vision of an arts district that includes PNB. The PNB would make a great partner for the artist providing added visibility to the Ballet School’s marketing activities.

Steps and ramps leading into the school doors make an interesting stage for a temporary performance. There are also several loading docks for businesses housed next to the Ballet School. The loading docks are served by a fairly large and mostly flat parking lot in front of them. The six loading dock doors are up-sliding steel doors and are all in a row which could provide excellent possibilities for performances. A partnership with each of the businesses to utilize a few feet of temporary space behind each of the doors for performances and/or projections would provide additional support for temporary art projects.

Cadman

Located on the west side of 130th Av NE, Bellevue, WA between NE 20th ST and NE 15th PL. This site is in the core of the Bel-Red area . Though it may not be functioning as actively as in the past, it has a presence similar to Seattle's Gasworks Park on the north shore of Lake Union. In addition to its industrial theme, there is a large, open field that could serve as a presentation space for art installations.

Pacific Topsoils Inc.

Located at 1733 127th AV NE, Bellevue, WA. This site, in the heart of a commercial / industrial area, is recycling land waste into compost, mulch and other landscaping materials. It suggests the potential for resource reclamation and reuse in an unexpected location, and is one of the only "green" businesses found in the Bel-Red sector.

Coca-Cola Inc.

Located at 1150 124th AV NE, Bellevue, WA. The Coca-Cola site offers multiple potential locations for art installations. In addition to the highly visible landscaped space at the corner of 124th AV and Bel-Red RD there is an enormous, and currently unused, space in the back-lot that provides a variety of art performance and installation possibilities.

Hertz Rental

Located at 13200 Bel-Red RD, Bellevue WA. Another industrially oriented location, this site offers interesting visual inspiration for artists and is reflective of many of the core businesses in

the sector. Heavy machinery and equipment at this site would make compelling backdrops or “participants” in artworks.

Marquees

At the time of this report there were numerous opportunities for small projects sited in existing marquees and sign holders, both used and unused. Examples include the empty marquee in the unused gas station at the corner of 140th and Bel-Red RD and the large sign on top of the Staples/Safeway building on 140th AV

Moveable Pieces

(Not on map) U Haul trucks or Metro buses could be candidates for art installations promoting the upcoming changes and historical significance of the Bel-Red sector.

Numerous Parking Lots

(Not on map) There are many opportunities to exploit parking spaces within the Bel-Red sector for art installations. These sites are highly trafficked and provide artists with a large, local audience.

THEMES OF PARTICULAR RELEVANCE THAT ARTISTS MIGHT EXPLORE

- Technology
- Local agricultural history
- Transit and transportation
- “Natural infrastructure” such as stream beds and wetlands
- Collaboration or conflict between human and machine
- Community and sustainability
- Media might include:
 - Music
 - Digital work
 - Sound
 - Poetry
 - Dance
 - Performance
 - Video

The media that best express their vision and is appropriate to the site is naturally the artist’s decision. We believe that video, sound or performance pieces may especially encourage the public to imagine and experience possibilities in Bel-Red.

CONSIDERATIONS AND ISSUES TO ADDRESS

It is of critical importance to engage existing businesses in supporting or participating in the arts plan. We strongly encourage collaboration between artists and developers and businesses in providing art opportunities in Bel-Red. In our experience in developing a preliminary art plan for 21 miles of bicycle path for Pierce County’s Foothills Trail, businesses along the trail benefited from the map at the trailhead identifying nearby businesses. After individual interview and informational sessions, many local businesses voiced a willingness to support the trail through in-kind donations of time and materials, and cash donations for various components along the trail. It must be determined how outreach to developers and businesses can be best accomplished, and what is the most effective timing.

Artists will need to consider how to generate attention in a car oriented environment and how the public can experience a sense of place in an area that feels mostly anonymous, outside of pockets of the natural world and shared play areas.

Artists will need to consider how the natural infrastructure of the area be highlighted, yet also protected. How can artists create an awareness of the importance of protecting sensitive areas from the impacts of current use and future growth?

Artists will need to work with the City's planning and traffic safety departments to ensure driver and pedestrian safety while presenting engaging temporary work.

Artists must consider methods of making their work most participatory. How might they use social media to draw audiences and participants?

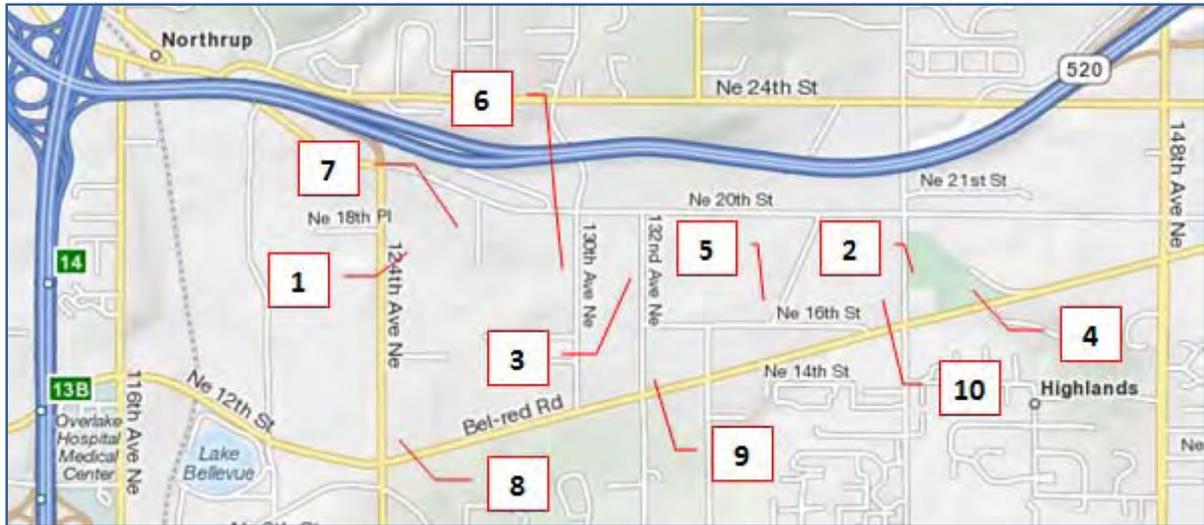
A critical component to the success of any art plan is the identification of the area's stakeholders. In the case of Bel-Red, stakeholders include residents, existing and future businesses, City departments, developers, and organizations such as 4Culture and Sound Transit.

It must be determined whether there are any absolute prohibitions against using these sites. For stream and wetland sites, it must be determined if and exactly where art projects might take place.

NEXT STEPS

In mapping the Bel-Red corridor we uncovered opportunities that exist today while looking into the future for the arts in the area. This preliminary arts plan is only a beginning. We identified the most favorable sites for artists and planners to access immediately, found numerous other opportunities which call for further research and identified issues that need to be addressed. The process of revealing opportunities for arts activities in Bel-Red should continue. A comprehensive plan will provide an in-depth, long term strategy to continue the process of establishing Bel-Red as Bellevue's cultural heart.

SITE LOCATIONS AND PHOTOS



1. West Tributary Wetland



2. Kelsey Creek Tributary



3. Goff Creek



4. Highland Park



5. Pacific Northwest Ballet School



6. Cadman



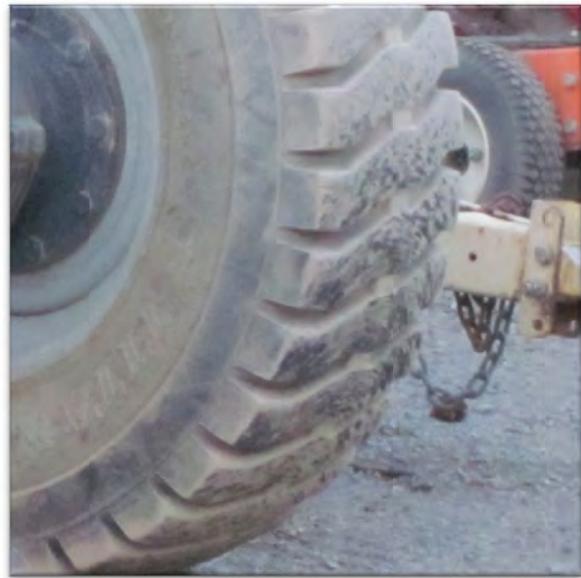
7. Pacific Topsoils Inc.



8. Coca-Cola Inc.



9. Hertz Rental



10. Marquees - Staples/Safeway, Gas Station

