

BELLEVUE ARTS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES

July 23, 2013
4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E -109

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Tremblay, Commissioners Cole, Jackson, Manfredi, Smith

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Fateeva

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Pablo Schugurensky, Kurt Kiefer, Jenny Heisman, Meta Artè; Barbara Luecke, Sound Transit

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order as a study session at 4:34 p.m. by Chairperson Tremblay who presided. All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Cole who arrived at 4:37 p.m., and Commissioner Fateeva, who was excused.

2. AGENDA AND MINTUES APPROVAL – None.

3. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS – None

4. DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. East Link Art Opportunities (continued discussion from July 2nd meeting)

Arts Specialist Mary Pat Byrne introduced Pablo Schugurensky, Kurt Kiefer and Jenny Heisman from Meta Artè, and Barbara Luecke from Sound Transit. She also stressed that some priority recommendations will need to be made to Sound Transit because it is likely the cost of the opportunities identified would exceed the budget available.

Mr. Kiefer said as the design of the stations progresses, some of the station areas first labeled as art opportunities are no longer for various reasons. He added that the large number of artists on the Sound Transit roster is being organized with an eye on how to best articulate the characteristics of each place.

Mr. Schugurensky reminded the Commissioners that Sound Transit would like to have system-wide art elements and art that capitalizes on the opportunities at each station. For the six Bellevue stations, finding the essential relation for each to its surroundings will be very exciting.

Ms. Byrne noted that in addition to identifying ideas linking Bellevue's stations, the process going forward will include sitting down with panels of residents, art professionals, and other stakeholders to look at artists and proposals for the stations.

Mr. Kiefer said one example of what at first was identified as an opportunity is the big park area associated with the East Main station. He noted that it is turning out to be far more challenging than first expected. The process to redesign the space is being led by the city and the timing of the selection process and the schedule do not mesh. If the Commission is interested in locating a sculpture in that space, it will be necessary to talk with the parks department. A second example is the portal space previously identified as an opportunity which will be less visible than first anticipated. However, it may still be a site to address.

The Commissioners were informed by Mr. Kiefer that earlier in the day Sound Transit staff discussed the need to move as quickly and as efficiently as possible in making decisions about the 130th Avenue NE and the Downtown station. Ms. Luecke added that management has directed that the 120th Avenue NE station be put on hold temporarily pending a decision for how to move forward with Wright Runstad. Ms. Byrne pointed out that both 130th and the 120th stations are in the arts district and as such there is the potential for the art at each station to relate to the other.

Mr. Kiefer commented that the 130th Avenue NE station site is very constrained. It will be surrounded by transit-oriented development and other uses yet to be determined. The station will have an ancillary structure to house bicycle storage. Another facility to the west will hold other ancillary functions. The opportunities for art at the station include the metal work of the fence surrounding the station. The bicycle facility may also be an opportunity. He said Sound Transit encourages biking and as such seeks to provide ample accommodation. Every station includes bicycle racks, cages that are more secure, and lockers. A surface park and ride lot adjacent to the station is in the plan, though it is called out as a temporary facility; the city has been very vocal about wanting to see the site develop with mixed use residential by the time the station opens. For that reason, any art done in association with the bicycle cage should be designed to be moved easily.

The Commissioners were shown drawings depicting the station design with its side-loading platform. It was noted that utilitarian fencing would be used to keep people away from the track and that the fencing could be a prime opportunity for art.

Ms. Byrne asked about opportunities that could be locally programmed. Ms. Luecke said the embedded rail could be a future design feature, as opposed to rail with a ballast. Embedded rail runs close to the grade of the street and some urban designers believe when the rail is surrounded by cast concrete the systems feel more urban and less industrial. It is, however, more expensive and harder to maintain. The at-grade segment of the rail will extend from just east of the 130th Avenue NE station to where the track curves by Pacific Northwest Ballet, and an extra level of urban design care will be given to that segment. Opportunities for what Mr. Kiefer referred to as “very local artists” could be included. That approach is consistent with celebrating an arts district. There could also be opportunities for art on the ticket area wall and the ceiling, particularly something that would play with light.

Commissioner Cole said she could envision a temporal and ever-changing dynamic installation at what will be a key station for the arts district. Ms. Byrne commented that it would require segregating a portion of the Bellevue Arts Program funds available and committing them to the project over time. It would be necessary to structure program resources in a way that will not impact the ability of the Commission to commit to other future projects.

Commissioner Cole commented that the art at the station could be utilitarian and functional in the way it channels either light or water runoff.

Chair Tremblay said while the opportunities for the 130th Avenue NE station may not be on a grand scale, the station could ultimately be the jewel in the crown. The idea of playing with water is not

farfetched. Mr. Schugurensky cautioned the Commissioners to keep in mind both cost and maintenance over time.

Commissioner Cole said she would like to see art reflecting the young and the creative. In the same way graffiti changes on a railway car, the station could feature cool dynamic changes to its art. Ms. Byrne pointed out that the station will not be constructed until 2023 and it will be in place for 40 or 50 years, and what is young now will be old by the time the station opens. Chair Tremblay said there is a bridge in Italy that has a tapestry of locks that people have added to over time. The interactive aspect defies age. What Bellevue has done in other places of the city is to create art for people to look at, but what is needed in Bel-Red is art that can be mixed up and interactive.

Commissioner Cole pointed out that while the interplay of shadow and light can make for great art, whimsy does not last over the years. Chair Tremblay agreed and added that Bellevue has a wonderful history of a craft tradition, including glass and metals. She said there is a real innovation going on around materials and sustainability.

Commissioner Cole asked if the colors for the station have been approved. She was informed by Ms. Luecke that the architects are working with a very narrow pallet of colors.

Mr. Schugurensky said there will be canopies in the center of the platform on both sides and he asked if the Commissioners would like to consider them as opportunities for artistic treatment.

Mr. MacDonald commented that whether it be light, water or other artwork, if an artist getting off the train at the station is inspired to draw what is happening there, the art will be a success.

Commissioner Cole said she would like nothing more than to see the arts community take ownership of the station wall somewhere down the road. The wall offers the best opportunity of any of the stations to have a blank canvas.

Mr. Kiefer shared with the Commissioners drawings of the station by City Hall (referred to as City Hall Station). He noted that station will have a large volume area and staircases on the side. Because of where the elevators have to land in relation to the platforms, the volume of the station is not particularly tall but is quite deep. There will be a lot of glass as well as large external wall surfaces.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Jackson, Ms. Luecke said the section along the NE 6th Street sidewalk there will be a large wall and a terrace. The area could be called out as appropriate for temporary installations. She said too many buildings in the city turn a blank solid wall to the sidewalk; the Bravern is one of the worst examples in that it focuses only on NE 8th Street, leaving all of its other walls blank. It will be critical that the NE 6th Street wall not be blank facing the street. Ms. Luecke said the plan calls for a lot of plantings on the terraces that step down toward the street. She agreed it could be a good location for the Commission to get involved with programming the little niches.

Commissioner Cole commented that the city hall station will be the flagship and as such should say something about the whole city. Currently the downtown is not pedestrian in scale, has a lot of blank walls without windows. Every opportunity should be taken to make sure the city hall station does not fit that genre. Mr. Schugurensky said the city hall station is the only station in Bellevue that will have elements below ground, at-grade and elevated.

Chair Tremblay said the Linda Beaumont floor at City Hall hits the mark relative to being polished, crafted and beautiful. It is tactile, it has an environmental message, and it has a flow to it. She suggested having the river that flows through the City Hall floor carry over to the downtown station via various estuaries. She said the artist to do the work should be Linda Beaumont.

Commissioner Jackson agreed and said she particularly liked the idea of integrating the city hall station with City Hall by continuing the pattern of the floor, even if the installation moves to the walls. The station needs to be openly inviting and welcoming, not formal and imposing. Ms. Byrne concurred but pointed out the need to include with warm and welcoming with the notion of being a civic presence. City Hall strikes that balance; it deals with large volumes and uses materials that are northwest and warm, yet on a scale that evokes the substantial and the permanent.

With regard to playing with light and shadow, Commissioner Cole said the station could be compared to the difference in light between being on a stage and being in an audience looking at the stage. If done right, the sense of coming up onto the stage could be achieved inside the station, making people feel as though they are part of the show. That also speaks to how democracy works, that one can feel a part of the whole.

Chair Tremblay suggested that somewhere in the mix the notion of activating spaces at night with light should be kept in mind. Much of Bellevue is vacated at night and some opportunities are lost as a result. Commissioner Jackson agreed but said she would not like the feeling to be that of a big bright spotlight shining down on them. Light can, however, create a strong sense of having arrived somewhere.

Ms. Byrne encouraged the Commissioners not to overlook the need to provide for connectivity between the station and the transit center as well as City Hall. People who use the transit center will need to be able to find their way over to the train and back. The wayfinding needed could offer a landmark opportunity.

Commissioner Jackson said she would prefer to avoid having the station compete with City Hall. It would be far better to have it merge with City Hall.

Chair Tremblay commented that the use of texture is one way to interpret diversity, even in abstract ways.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Cole, Ms. Luecke said Sound Transit staff and management are working to identify which segments and stations should go first. She said it appears first out of the gate will be the two Redmond stations because they will both be design/build contracts. An artist needs to be brought on board before a contractor is chosen.

Chair Tremblay commented that the naming of the stations is under way in a parallel process. Ms. Luecke said Sound Transit's outreach department is driving that process, which has been highlighted at each of the open house events. Ultimately the individual station names will be selected by the board of directors based on a great deal of feedback from the communities at about the 60 percent design phase, which is fast approaching.

Commissioner Jackson suggested that station names should be primarily about wayfinding. Ms. Luecke agreed but said the board will rely heavily on the comments made by the public.

Ms. Byrne said she would schedule time on an upcoming agenda to discuss the other stations.

5. COMMISSION QUICK BUSINESS

6. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Tremblay adjourned the study session at 6:08 p.m.