

**Bellevue Arts Commission  
Regular Meeting  
Minutes**

January 10, 2024  
4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
Virtual Meeting

Commissioners Present: Chairperson Gowdy, Commissioners Aldredge, Enomoto, Martinez

Commissioners Remote: Commissioner Bhargava

Commissioners Absent: Commissioner Gulati, Nederlander

Staff Present: Manette Stamm, Lorie Hoffman, Department of Community Development

Others Present: Sara Boyle, Dr. Marcus Johnson, DEI; Councilmember Stokes

Recording Secretary: Gerry Lindsay

**I. Call To Order**

The meeting was called to order at 4:33 p.m. by Chair Gowdy who presided. All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Martinez, who arrived at 4:35 p.m., and Commissioners Gulati and Nederlander.

**2. Approval of Agenda and Minutes**

A. Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Aldredge. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Enomoto, and the motion was carried unanimously.

B. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the December 6, 2023, minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Aldredge. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bhargava, and the motion was carried unanimously.

**3. Oral Communications – None**

**4. Action, Discussion and Information Items**

A. Cross-Cultural Center Without Walls Pilot Project

Equity Coordinator Sara Boyle explained that the upcoming Cross-Cultural Center Without Walls project will be up and running in Bellevue from May or June of 2024 through May 2025. The project has been discussed since 2016 given Bellevue's diverse population and the desire to have a space or program to bring together people from different cultures to build relationships and learn from each other. In 2018, the City Council directed a series of three feasibility studies focused on the possibilities of having

a cross-cultural center or program. In 2022, it was found that having a new building would present a significant financial cost, so the team was directed to develop cross-cultural programming and explore partnerships to create programs.

The DEI team brought forward the idea of a cross-cultural center without walls. The idea is to have different cross-cultural programs travel around the city to different locations, such as the community centers and school district facilities, as well as museums, libraries and parks. Each cross-cultural program will be created and led by community organizations, not by the city.

Cross-cultural programming involves two or more cultures coming together intentionally exchanging learning, traditions, and perspectives and building new relationships. The intent is to take the work currently being done to the next level to build bridges and break down barriers between cultures. Race, ethnicity, and country of origin are absolutely elements of culture, but thinking about what makes people who they are and how they navigate the world includes things like religious background, gender and sexuality, age and generation, disability status, and economic class.

Sara Boyle said one of the biggest findings from the three feasibility studies is that the community wants the work to be led by the community but supported by the city with capacity and infrastructure. During the fall of 2023, a series of three community workshops were held and attended by about 150 persons who brainstormed more than 70 ideas of what they would like to learn about in cross-cultural programs and activities. From that list some guiding principles or key ingredients were distilled, all leading to inviting community organizations to submit proposals for cross-cultural programs and activities. The community feedback will be used to create a project scope of work.

The word culture is usually associated with food, music and art, and all of those items were discussed. Other unique ideas were also raised, including a workshop focused on how different people celebrate rites of passage; the influence of hip-hop across cultures; queer histories and storytelling across the globe; rituals around how cultures acknowledge and process grief; and different kinds of tea ceremonies.

The next step will be to invite community organizations to submit project ideas. Contracts, not grants, totaling between \$5,000 and \$10,000 will be available for organizations. Some 20 to 30 contracts will be awarded.

An informal RFP process will be used, and the goal is to open the process on February 5. An evaluation committee made up of staff and community members will review the proposals during March and April. The selected organizations will be notified, and the cross-cultural pilot programs will kick off in May or June. The plan is to return to the Council at the end of the pilot year to provide a full report on the programs, what worked and did not, what was exciting, and what people want to see more of.

Commissioner Gowdy asked if different organizations willing to take charge are being found. Sara Boyle said the DEI team has been working in the city for the last two years and has met with various organizations that are doing fantastic work, even some cross-cultural work.

Commissioner Aldredge asked if there are specific criteria that organizations must meet, such as having 501(C)(3) status. Sara Boyle said that because the work will be carried out by contract rather than grant, the organizations do not need to have non-profit status.

Commissioner Enomoto asked how the RFP will be distributed. Sara Boyle explained that it will be distributed through an open call involving existing listservs, a press release and on the city's website. Applicants will not have to be registered vendors with the city.

Commissioner Enomoto asked where the program will end up once the one-year pilot ends. Sara Boyle allowed that there is no answer to that question yet. The program may become permanent and could ultimately end up having physical space and may be shared across multiple departments, but that will depend on how things play out.

Commissioner Martinez said that a lot of work has gone into the feasibility of having a cross-cultural center, and the pilot is an excellent interim step. Sara Boyle said the team has been working closely with the planning and community development folks to understand what existing buildings or properties are available that might have some opportunity to develop a permanent center. Partnerships with organizations such as the school district are also being discussed.

Commissioner Martinez asked what type of reporting the team was looking for on the pilot program. Sara Boyle said how to evaluate the program has been discussed and is still under discussion. A group that includes arts staff are helping to answer that question. Attendance and the demographics of the attendees will undoubtedly be looked at, as will the stories of the participating organizations relative to the value of the cross-cultural components and the question of whether new partnerships and relationships were formed in the process. Bellevue already has a solid cultural and multi-cultural theme, so whether the programming is different or is something people experience differently will be looked at.

Commissioner Bhargava asked if the center will be limited to formal organized events, or if it will be a center where people can walk in, sit down together and have open conversations. Sara Boyle said the original feasibility studies included some surveying around what the ideal cross-cultural center would look like. Programs and events were only a single leg of the stool. People spoke to having one-stop resources and a living room of community, a place to gather and be. The traveling center project will not yield that outcome.

#### B. Adoption of Required Updates to Arts Commission Bylaws

Arts Program Analyst Manette Stamm briefly reviewed the discussion held at the Commission's previous meeting relative to the proposed revisions to the bylaws.

A motion to approve the bylaws was made by Commissioner Enomoto. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Martinez, and the motion was carried unanimously.

#### C. 2024 Work Planning

Manette Stamm commented that a new cultural facilities grant program will be launched in the first quarter of 2024. The final touches of what the program will look like are still being worked out. The program will differ from the existing grant program's more programmatic operational support approach, which will continue on its own. The new program will fund major building improvements and new facilities for arts and culture. Currently under review is whether the program could fund feasibility studies and what type of review process will be required. The Commission will be kept in the loop as the year progresses.

Arts Community Manager Lorie Hoffman said the continuing work on the BelRed Arts District is exciting. The second phase of the mural program is being prepped for installation in 2025 following work to be done in 2024. One possible option is the Pacific Northwest Ballet wall where a large single mural could be sited. Another option would be to look at a combination of walls with smaller murals. The BelRed Arts District Community Alliance has officially gained 501(C)(3) status and the city is continuing to work with the group as a partner. Work will continue through the year on the items in the BelRed Arts District implementation plan, including working on a slightly more permissive sound code to allow for more activities.

On the economic side, work continues with the economic development partners on things like light pole banners. The BelRed Look Forward work is also being closely tracked.

Commissioner Aldredge asked if there was funding for the murals and the banners. Lorie Hoffman said there is funding available in the public art CIP program. The banner could actually tap a couple of different funding sources given that the banners may be about placemaking and not just public art.

Commissioner Martinez asked if the cultural facilities program will be given a particular emphasis similar to that given to the BelRed Arts District program. Lorie Hoffman said that is yet to be determined. Since cultural facilities involve larger awards and fewer of them, there will not be as many applications as for the arts programs. Manette Stamm said that the review criteria may include location in an area with a great need for arts facilities.

Turning to Bellwether, Manette Stamm said it is not yet known what the event will look like. The year will likely be used to get the committee together and see if some external surveying is needed in the community.

Commissioner Martinez asked if funds were left over from the contract for 2024. Lorie Hoffman said the contract with PACE for 2024 was canceled, so the funds remain in the public art CIP. The funds may be reallocated to other things.

Concerning public art, the Commissioners were informed that Public Art Specialist Scott MacDonald is looking into colored lighting for Downtown Park. What that might look like or if it is even feasible is still unknown currently, but it is being explored.

The fabrication and installation of Jill Anholt's public art project is moving along. Po Shu Wang's work is in storage waiting for the site to be ready. Work on the Crossroads public art project is underway and moving along. *When Then Becomes Now* will be formally deaccessioned during the year. Maintenance and restoration of critical artworks will continue throughout the year. Staff will continue to work with the school district on more utility box wraps. The Creative Crosswalk artist is working on outreach to inform the design; the work will be installed during the summer. *Emerging Radiance* will hopefully be installed in late January or early February; a large community celebration will occur in late spring. Work is continuing on finding a site for *Bellgate*. There are continuing conversations regarding *Guan Yin*, specifically around whose artwork it is and who will maintain it if it is installed.

Scott MacDonald is also working on public art signage and mapping. The Commission will be presented with recommendations once they are ready. Staff are also working on

public art policies relative to donations, deaccessions, and accessions, which will also be brought before the Commission.

Regarding cultural space, Lorie Hoffman said staff continue to work with the large community partners who have space. A funding request was recently received from the Bellevue Art Museum, and there are ongoing conversations with the organization. The facility needs of other large community partners, including KidsQuest, differ significantly from those of the programmatic partners. The cultural facilities grant will look at how to help organizations that are scaling up in size and how organizations with space can accomplish some needed maintenance. There are continued conversations with affordable housing partners relative to the Kelly parcel in BelRed with an eye on delivering affordable housing for artists and affordable creative space. Beyond living and incubation space, artists still need a larger space to produce larger shows. Meydenbauer Center is an excellent resource, but it has 400 seats, and several studies in hand call for needing much more than that on the order of 1000 to 1200 seats.

Commissioner Aldredge voiced the understanding that PACE was intended to fill that role. Councilmember Stokes agreed but stressed their vision was not as broad or as focused. Lorie Hoffman added there might be a need to slide into more of a proactive stance rather than a reactive stance.

Lorie Hoffman said it is exciting that the TPA has come online; it is contracted and delivering. In the coming year, there will be quite a lot of emphasis on additional promotion of Bellevue as a tourist destination. Within those funds, there is a small incubation fee that Visit Bellevue is handling. The funds can be used by organizations looking to scale up to the level of attracting tourists. Film incentives and permits are also being looked at. Bellevue does not currently have a lot of film work and as such is missing out on a lot of economic and cultural activity. The city does not even have a formal film permit.

Councilmember Stokes suggested Chief Economic Development Officer Jesse Canedo should be invited to give the Commission an update on the creative economy, which has been shown to have a big payback. Tourism has increased significantly over the last five years and the arts community needs to be a part of that. Lorie Hoffman pointed out that the arts and economic prosperity study showed that most tourists in Bellevue engage in arts and culture activities. The return on investment in arts and culture programs is some 750 percent in terms of tax revenue.

Commissioner Martinez asked about the regional performing arts center. Lorie Hoffman said there has been a desire on the part of the community for the past several decades to have a regional performing arts center. Meydenbauer Center at 400 seats is too small; something in the order of 1,000 to 1,500 seats is needed. Historically, the city has relied on external partners to get across the finish line. At one point, the city entered into a funding agreement with PACE, but that funding was contingent on several never realized issues. The need, however, has not gone away. PACE continues operating as an organization and is continuing to seek ways to move forward. The city may need to take a more proactive approach.

Councilmember Stokes said there is a willingness on the part of the city to support a feasible structure and approach. Lorie Hoffman pointed out that even if PACE were to successfully develop its vision, there would still be a need to be met in terms of a facility. It would be suitable for PACE to provide the Commission with an update on their work.

Commissioner Aldredge asked if there were any plans to expand Meydenbauer Center. Councilmember Stokes said that is being discussed, though how many more seats can be achieved is questionable.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Martinez, Lorie Hoffman said organizations can present funding requests to the city outside of a formal process. The cultural facility grant will hopefully help address that issue to some degree.

Councilmember Stokes commented that the Bellevue Art Museum is continuing to struggle. There was a time in the past when it was thought the facility could be lost altogether. The city is supportive of figuring out how to help. No one wants to see the organization lost. KidsQuest also needs more space, preferably with an arts and culture component. There is a clear desire to have the organization remain in Bellevue. The organization is strong and successful; it just needs more space.

Commissioner Bhargava suggested that, ideally, Bellevue needs a campus-type center with facilities that attract different age brackets along the lines of the Seattle Center.

## **5. Commission Quick Business**

Councilmember Stokes reported having been reappointed as Council liaison to the Arts Commission and noted still being involved with the Eastrail project. Concerning Eastrail, there continues to be a focus on having artistic and cultural elements along it. The Grand Connection piece ties into the Eastrail project and presents additional opportunities.

Councilmember Stokes also remarked that the Councilmembers are all very excited about the BelRed Arts District, something that has been under discussion for a long time. The BelRed Look Forward and the Wilburton work both have arts and cultural elements that can lead the way for other areas of the city.

## **6. Reports**

### **A. Project Updates**

Manette Stamm reported that staff are working internally in the early stages of the biannual budgeting process. About the grants program, it was noted that all grantees accepted their awards. The portable art collection currently displayed at City Hall will be coming down soon. The Black History Month celebration will include some art at City Hall. Some photographs on loan from Sound Transit will soon be displayed to celebrate the line's opening in Bellevue.

## **7. Communications – None**

## **8. Adjournment**

Commissioner Gowdy adjourned the meeting at 5:34 p.m.