

**Bellevue Arts Commission
Regular Meeting
Minutes**

September 6, 2023
4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Virtual Meeting

Commissioners Present:	Chairperson Gowdy, Commissioners Aldredge, Gulati, Martinez, Nederlander
Commissioners Remote:	Commissioners Enomoto, Bhargava
Commissioners Absent:	None
Staff Present:	Manette Stamm, Lorie Hoffman, Corbin Hart, Ashis Joshi, Of Community Development
Others Present:	None
Recording Secretary:	Gerry Lindsay

I. Call To Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:32 p.m. by Chair Gowdy who presided. All Commissioners were present.

Commissioner Gowdy took a moment to introduce new Commissioner Nederlander.

2. Approval of Agenda and Minutes

A. Approval of Agenda

Motion to revise the agenda by moving Item 4-B to follow Item 4-D and to approve the agenda as amended was made by Commissioner Aldredge. The motion was seconded was by Commissioner Martinez and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Bhargava noted not having attended the July 18, 2023, meeting and pointed out the need for the minutes to reflect the absence at the top of the first page.

Motion to approve the July 18, 2023, minutes as amended was made by Commissioner Martinez. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Nederlander, and the motion was carried unanimously.

3. Oral Communications – None

4. Action, Discussion and Information Items

A. Cultural and Economic Development Overview

Business Development Manager Corbin Hart stated that Bellevue is a tech industry powerhouse. The city is home to 45 corporate headquarters and over 90 major international branch offices. The city's highly educated workforce attracts companies, a high quality of life, and the competitive tax structure, as well as the amenities that include experiential shopping and dining and one-of-a-kind cultural experiences.

Bellevue is also a prime visitor destination. Some 1.8 million visitors came to Bellevue in 2022 and stayed overnight. On average, they spent about \$503. The occupancy rate in 2022 was 61 percent, reflecting that the city is still recovering from the pandemic. The arts and the creative economy are a silver lining in the recovery efforts through prime events such as Wintergrass and ARTSfair.

Bellevue is strategically located within the Puget Sound region and is a critical transit hub. There are strong transit routes, including bus routes, that serve the entire region. East Link light rail will become active in March 2024, and once that connection is completed to Seattle in 2025, the projection is that the route will see some 50,000 riders daily. While Bellevue only has a population of about 155,000, the high level of employment in the city means that the population swells daily to some 230,000.

Talent is the top element driving the city's economic growth. Bellevue is the third most educated city in the United States. At 71 percent, the city has double the national average population with a bachelor's degree. Forty-five percent of the city's workforce was born outside the United States. While many are from Asian countries, there is also a large Russian and Ukrainian population. Investments flow into the city from several countries, including South Korea, Germany and the United Kingdom. Bellevue produces 17 patents per thousand residents, double that of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and just less than double that of Boulder, Colorado.

Bellevue's creative economy is a hidden gem. It accounts for about 16 percent of overall employment. Creative economies have ancillary effects, including tourism and site-selection decisions when companies decide where to locate offices. The digital creative sectors in Bellevue comprise about 91 percent of the creative employment, though the traditional creative sector is growing faster. The linkages between the traditional and digital creative economies present a large opportunity and competitive advantage for the city.

There are 554 traditional creative businesses in Bellevue. They are businesses that, within their licensing, have indicated having arts as their foremost role. Including educational institutions and ancillary businesses would increase that number significantly. About a fifth of the businesses are in BelRed. Bellevue has the highest per-capita arts, entertainment and recreation sales of all cities in King County. The traditional creative sector is a key engine for Bellevue's tourism industry.

Six of the ten highest-revenue gaming companies are present in Bellevue. That presents a large competitive advantage for Bellevue's creative sector.

Continuing, Corbin Hart stated that the BelRed Arts District provides a unique economic niche as a district in the city. The Downtown business district is a value proposition for a tech company wanting to be in a central business district that attracts a large workforce. An arts district attracts more creative businesses, but also tech companies that want to locate in a more creative environment. Arts districts attract talent as well as tourism. There are more than 150 creative businesses located in BelRed, and in that district, there is a focus on preventing displacement. Many creative businesses are also small

businesses, and there is a clear need to ensure space for them in both new and existing developments.

A study of the city's retail sector is underway, and the findings will hopefully inform how the city can build on programming or policy to allow for affordable commercial and arts space. Overall, the retail sector supports about 35 percent of the city's tax revenues, predominantly via sales tax. Sales in terms of musical instruments and the performing arts are significant generators of sales taxes.

Focusing specifically on BelRed, public opinion by both residents and those who visit Bellevue was quite low as to the issue of the district as a retail destination. There was an equal split between those saying BelRed is pretty good and bad as a retail destination. Of more interest was the fact that the highest response favored neither, meaning they had no real perception of the district. From a retail perspective, that data indicates the district is a blank slate from which to work. A national retail consultant identified a desire for pedestrian-oriented development. The new construction Miami Design Arts District was looked at as a comparable, though it is more specific to the fashion scene. It was determined that BelRed has strong demographics for investment.

Commissioner Martinez asked if the Council has identified an amount it is willing to invest in BelRed. Corbin Hart said there is a lot of investment happening and planned for BelRed, though there is no comprehensive tracking in place. Lorie Hoffman added that there is a lot of investment coming from many areas, but there is no one specific BelRed pool.

Commissioner Aldredge asked about efforts to keep arts businesses in BelRed. With new construction, displacement is always a concern, given higher rents. Corbin Hart said several interventions are being explored on that front. A direct subsidy would not make sense, given the huge gap between existing rents and rents in new construction. Nationally there are some ownership models in place under which organizations, usually non-profit, manage spaces. Some cities also employ interesting land use code incentives, and there are opportunities for utilizing sites owned by governmental entities. Lorie Hoffman said several tools are in the toolbox, and the answer likely lies in using all of them. There are things like a business improvement district that could, in future years, bolster the arts district. At the state level, consideration is also being given to things like sales tax abatement for creative businesses within a designated creative district. Bellevue is not the only jurisdiction trying to solve the problem.

Commissioner Gowdy asked how the information presented is being distributed and utilized. Corbin Hart said the presentation is the type of data shared with companies interested in coming to Bellevue and even with developers and property owners. Various recommendations are being built from the data from the retail study. The study is especially valuable for the city's retailers, especially the small ones that cannot otherwise get such expensive data.

Commissioner Nederlander asked about statistics on the displacement of creative businesses in BelRed. Corbin Hart said it would be possible to review the number of business licenses lost. The fact is that a lot of the displacement in BelRed has not yet happened. Some tracking was done concerning COVID-19, which caused several food services and accommodation for tourism businesses to close. There were some arts organizations in that mix.

Ashis Joshi said there were some state-level initiatives, like the Working Washington Round 5 grants, that involved some creative businesses in BelRed. There were 84 businesses awarded Working Washington Round 5 grants, 32 of which were for hospitality. Corbin Hart added that when strip malls and the like are earmarked for redevelopment, city staff work with the current tenants in seeking new leases. The practice will be expanded to BelRed once there are applicable developments happening there.

Commissioner Nederlander asked if the city has emergency funds to help a creative institution facing temporary distress. Corbin Hart answered that during the pandemic, there were some temporary options available in the form of grant programs. There were also some programs backward facing the lease arrears front. Those programs are no longer in place. Nonetheless, there are community development financial institutions that help provide capital to non-profits or groups lacking access to traditional capital. There are also the more traditional financing connections like the Small Business Administration.

C. Committee Assignments

Arts Program Analyst Manette Stamm reminded the Commissioners that committee assignments are made annually. Committees are groups of no more than three Commissioners, and they function to discuss specific bodies of work related to staff or other work.

The Commissioners were informed that the Allocations Committee reviews and makes grant recommendations. The Grants and Funding Committee will be turned to for recommendations regarding capital facilities grants. A new grant program is currently being created. The Public Art Committee reviews and provides recommendations on arts policies, future art projects, and other issues specific to the work of the Commission relative to guiding public art. The BelRed Arts District Committee is charged with working to help plan and inform the implementation of the arts district. The Community Partnerships Committee focuses on any work that may come up involving community partnerships.

Commissioner Enomoto expressed an interest in serving on the Allocations Committee and either the Public Art Committee or the BelRed Arts District Committee.

Commissioner Aldredge noted a desire to continue serving as a member of the Public Art Committee and on whatever committee needs another member. Manette Stamm assigned Commissioner Aldredge to the Community Partnerships Committee.

Commissioner Gowdy asked to continue serving on the BelRed Arts District Committee and noted a willingness to serve on the Allocations Committee or wherever needed. Manette Stamm assigned Commissioner Gowdy to serve on the Community Partnerships Committee.

Commissioner Martinez favored serving on the BelRed Arts District Committee and the Community Partnerships Committee.

Commissioner Nederlander asked to be a member of the Allocations Committee and the Public Art Committee.

Commissioner Bhargava also asked to be a member of the Allocations Committee and the Public Art Committee and noted a willingness to serve on the Grants and Funding Committee.

Commissioner Gowdy agreed to be removed from the Allocations Committee.

D. Public Art Maintenance Update

Manette Stamm noted that each year maintenance is scheduled for a few of the city's more critical works. They are city assets and need to be kept in good repair. All the work this year was done under contract by Artech.

Delight in Green on the Lake to Lake trail near Larsen Lake required a facelift with a power washer and an inspection for any condition issues.

Double Inquiry in Ashwood Plaza by the library received a wash and a waxing, which is required of bronze works.

Amore, located at the Northwest Arts Center, needed a wash and waxing. The inspection identified several spots of possible bronze disease, which is a deterioration of bronze. An expert has been asked to take a closer look.

Lorie Hoffman said the sizeable increase to the public art CIP program during the last budget cycle was partly needed to invest more in maintenance.

Manette Stamm said maintenance work is upcoming for *The Doorway* at Bellevue College and *Temple of Stones* at the South Bellevue Community College.

B. BelRed Arts District Update

Lorie Hoffman reminded the Commissioners that BelRed has the highest concentration of arts and culture organizations in the city by a large margin. Over a hundred creative businesses call BelRed home. The area was designated an arts district in the Comprehensive Plan and BelRed subarea plan in 2009, and in 2020 more specific policies around the arts district were adopted into the Economic Development Plan. In 2022 a consultant prepared a five-year implementation plan for how to get from here to here on the arts district. The plan, which builds off past work and looks toward the future, is being followed. At the time the plan was drafted, it considered work done by the city as well as work done by an undetermined community partner. That community partner has since been formed. The implementation plan outlines four strategy areas: management, visibility, creative space, and connection, each of which must work together to engender the growth of the arts district.

A lot of progress has been made relative to management. The BelRed Arts District Community Alliance was formally incorporated with the state as a non-profit organization in May 2023. The summer of 2022 was spent conducting some large community sessions relative to the arts district. From those sessions, a small group of community members emerged willing to move from ideation to practical application. The non-profit is still a small group but is looking to expand. A website and business directory have been launched and have already received more than 10,000 page views. The group maintains a very active social media presence, primarily on Instagram, and has some 1,674 followers. A BelRed Arts District logo has been created, and the group is starting to launch into community events via artist meet and greet events at the murals

and Arts in the Garden at the Bellevue Botanical Garden. An interactive map on the website shows the location of the creative businesses in BelRed. It is intended to drive traffic to those businesses.

Regarding creative space, there are clear concerns about displacement. There are a lot of tools in the toolbox on how to address the issue. The list of things the city has done recently includes the Art Market Study, the currently underway Cultural Facility Study by Bronfenbrenner Consulting, and working with the city's affordable housing team on the Kelly Site Program. Along with preserving existing spaces, there must be conversations about the spaces that need to be built, including encouraging developers to put creative spaces in their new buildings. Not all organizations in the creative field will be able to afford market rates, but some can. The overall approach must be a combination of preserving existing spaces and bringing new spaces online. The city will continue to look at the properties it owns in BelRed and consider how to use them to anchor the arts district.

The connection bucket goal is to have the district be seen as a place to come together, innovate, and experience art, culture and creativity. To that end, staff have knocked on doors outlining the programs and support services that are available. Support is being given to the Community Alliance as they build their business director and keep it updated. The arts district will be featured in an upcoming Lake to Lake episode with a small ditty on the murals. The district will be showcased more broadly in the city's communication channels in 2024. As needs arise, artists are connected with event spaces.

A lot is being done to further the goal of having the arts district become recognizable. The BelRed logo has been printed onto stickers, and it is being printed on street banners as well. The grant program was updated to include the BelRed Bonus, under which five organizations were selected to receive the grant provided their programs were brought to BelRed. Art Mall will deliver on one of those grants on September 9 with the opening at the Yuan Ru Art Center called *Plantasia*. The mural program has delivered eight murals to the heart of the arts district, and the community response has been incredible. The city's public art projects at 130th Avenue NE and Spring Boulevard and NE 12th Street and Spring Boulevard are still in progress.

Commissioner Aldredge asked where to go to stay updated on events in the BelRed Arts District. Lorie Hoffman shared that there is a hidden tab on the website. The Community Alliance intends to have a listing of what is going on in the district. Once the organization has its feet better planted, it will be possible to manage the listing better. Eastside Live, a calendar of arts and culture events on the Eastside, is a good starting place, though it is not comprehensive.

Commissioner Nederlander asked if the Alliance has considered launching a TikTok presence in addition to Instagram. Lorie Hoffman allowed that that likely will be a future conversation for the organization. Currently, they have expanded to the limits of their capacity. They do have a Facebook page.

Commissioner Martinez noted that former Arts Commissioner Maria Lau Hui is involved with the Community Alliance. Lorie Hoffman said Maria Lau Hui is serving as the organization's treasurer.

5. Commission Quick Business

Commissioner Aldredge shared having attended a kick-off event for Bellwether, though strangely, it was held in Woodinville. It was noted that in all the emails received regarding Bellwether and at the event, Amazon was credited as the partner and producer. No mention was made of the city of Bellevue. Lorie Hoffman explained that the city is partnering with PACE, and Amazon is their sponsor. The city's intent is not to have to shoulder the entire financial burden, thus, PACE has sought sponsors. Commissioner Aldredge said it is a good thing that Amazon is on board as a sponsor, but the city should be given some credit as well.

Commissioner Martinez asked if anything stops PACE from taking Bellwether to other cities if the city has no financial responsibility for the event. Lorie Hoffman said the event is still a city event. The city has contracted with PACE to produce the event, and decisions about whether to continue that contract are up to the city. Any organization can start a new event anytime with different parameters, but whether they can call it Bellwether and use the Bellwether logos is another conversation. The launch event was held at a board member's house for a very small group. The Commissioners were invited to the event, which primarily was a welcoming kickoff for the artists. It was not a public event.

Commissioner Bhargava noted having attended the Bellwether event. Indeed, the city was not mentioned.

Commissioner Enomoto asked if, in the future, partners could be asked by the city to run marketing or promotional materials for approval. Lorie Hoffman said it would be administratively burdensome to review all marketing materials. The city could directly outline up front and in the contract how it wants to be recognized.

6. Reports

- A. Commissioners' Committee and Lead Reports – As Noted
- B. Project Updates from Staff

Lorie Hoffman reminded the Commissioners the next two meetings were slated for October 4 and November 8. The rules regarding remote participation have changed, and a vote of approval no longer needs to occur at the previous meeting. Commissioners must, however, email staff at least 24 hours before a meeting.

The 2024 grant cycle is currently open, and applications are being accepted for project grants. The EAP support has moved to a two-year program, so the awards for 2024 have already been made.

The Arts and Economic Prosperity data collection has been completed. The first draft of the report is due to be released in October, and the final draft will be before the Commission in November.

Po Shu Wang has completed the fabrication of the artwork for the site at 130th Avenue NE and Spring Boulevard. It will be stored in Bellevue until the site is ready for installation.

Publicity for Bellwether is underway, and events are scheduled throughout the month of September. Details regarding the events can be found on the PACE website.

The application to collect artworks at Crossroads Park was extended to September 6. They will be before the Commission in October.

The final invoice for the Downtown Park artwork has been submitted, and once the punch list is completed, that work will finally be done. It is one of the city's largest installations ever.

Seven of the eight murals in the mural program have been completed. The final work has been slightly delayed, possibly as late as October.

7. Adjournment

Commissioner Gowdy adjourned the meeting at 5:41 p.m.