

**Bellevue Arts Commission
Special Meeting Minutes**

February 26, 2025
4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
1E-109 and Virtual

Commissioners Present:	Chairperson Aldredge, Commissioners Chen, Enomoto, Hazra
Commissioners Remote:	Commissioner Bhargava, Commissioner Nederlander
Commissioners Absent:	None
Staff Present:	Manette Stamm, Lorie Hoffman, and Scott MacDonald, Community Development Department
Others Present:	Colin Petkus, Eastrail Partners
Recording Secretary:	Gerry Lindsay

I. Call To Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:34 p.m. by Commissioner Enomoto who presided until the arrival of Chair Aldredge. All Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Hazra who arrived at 4:35 p.m., and Chair Aldredge, who arrived at 4:43 p.m.

A. Election of Vice Chair

Commissioner Enomoto opened the floor for nominations.

A motion to nominate Commissioner Bhargava was made by Commissioner Nederlander.

Arts Program Analyst Manette Stamm stressed that the Vice Chair serves as a backup to the Chair and as such must be present in person when the Chair is absent.

A motion to nominate Commissioner Enomoto was made by Commissioner Chen.

Absent additional nominations, the floor was closed to nominations.

Commissioner Enomoto received the majority of the votes and was elected to serve as Vice Chair.

2. Approval of Agenda and Minutes

A. Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Nederlander. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Chen and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the January 8, 2025, minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Nederlander. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Chen and the motion carried unanimously.

3. Oral Communications

Tani Ikeda, an immersive artist who recently worked closely with Arts Community Manager Lorie Hoffman on *Emerging Radiance*, emphasized the historical importance of murals and their connection to community narratives.

Alex Tsimerman expressed concerns about cultural and political issues and emphasized the importance of art in culture and criticized recent decisions, such as cutting the Library Commission and eliminating the East Bellevue Community Council.

Naren Briar reiterated the significance of the previously mentioned immersive exhibit, noting that it marked approximately 100 years since a significant historical event affecting Japanese Americans in the Pacific Northwest.

4. Action, Discussion and Information Items

A. Eastrail Arts Principles Update

Colin Petkus with Eastrail Partners, a nonprofit organization involved in the Eastrail rail-to-trail conversion project, explained that the project aims to transform former train tracks into a bike and pedestrian trail, which will eventually connect from the city of Renton to Snohomish County and the city of Snohomish. The project is a collaboration between seven different government entities, which makes it complex. The most recent segment to open in Bellevue is near the Wilburton Light Rail Station. Eastrail Partners was created to support the project by focusing on funding, community engagement, and public art initiatives. The organization sponsors events such as concerts, guided trail rides, and community clean-ups.

The Eastrail Arts Principles were formally adopted by the governing body in 2023 to apply to public art projects along the trail. The principles emphasize equity, inclusion, context and interconnection, collaboration, and cohesion and seek to ensure that public art remains a priority in the development process. The non-profit coordinated with others, including Eastside For All, on the cross-cultural art project that brought together various community groups, including trail advocates and cultural organizations, to explore diverse artistic expressions along the trail. The effort resulted in a large-scale performance featuring dance, music, and spoken word, as well as a temporary public art installation for Welcoming Week.

An important outcome of the efforts has been the development of an inclusive call for artists. Eastside For All led an initiative to create a more accessible process for diverse artists to participate in public art projects, including gathering input from artists and establishing a roster where BIPOC artists could sign up to receive targeted calls for proposals. A recent mural project served as a pilot for implementing inclusive practices; 40 submissions were received from a diverse group of artists across the county. The mural, created by artist Nikita Ares, was installed on a storage container near the NE 8th Street bridge. It has been considered a success and a model for future inclusive public art projects. Additional public art opportunities are being explored along the trail, including murals, wrapped signal boxes, and expanded performance spaces.

Colin Petkus touched on long-term development plans for the Wilburton neighborhood. Although redevelopment may take a decade or more, the nonprofit is advocating for the inclusion of public spaces and public art in the plans.

Chair Aldredge asked if the newly created artist roster had been coordinated with the existing Eastside Artist Roster. Colin Petkus allowed not being sure but committed to following up with colleagues to ensure alignment. Combining resources would improve diversity and representation.

Commissioner Enomoto asked if the current federal administration poses risks or challenges to funding and supporting the arts and diversity initiatives. Colin Petkus said there are valid concerns about funding for the trail project. Some federal funding earmarked for the project has not yet been allocated. The non-profit believes in the Eastrail Arts Principles and emphasizes equity, diversity, and cultural celebration. The uncertain funding environment makes future commitments unpredictable. Still, the organization remains firmly committed to advocating for the continuation of its mission and to strengthening its support rather than scaling back.

Commissioner Chen asked what percentage of the project's funding is federal dollars. Colin Petkus noted that approximately \$30 million in federal grants continue to be outstanding. A \$25 million grant had been awarded for a crucial segment of the project crossing over I-90.

Commissioner Hazra noted that, in response to the current federal administration, Bellevue College recently rebranded its DEI initiatives, though without changing any of the underlying principles, to secure federal funding.

Chair Aldredge remarked that the Beltline project in Atlanta, which is much further along, sponsors an annual mural competition. The program brings consistency and ongoing engagement with local and international artists. The suggestion was made to study the Beltline's funding model and artist selection process to inform Eastrail's approach. Colin Petkus acknowledged that Eastrail had drawn inspiration from the Beltline's guiding principles and agreed that examining their organizational structure and funding strategies would be beneficial.

Public Art Specialist Scott MacDonald added that the Beltline program is expansive in terms of the artists brought in, including many international artists from places that do not have trade treaties with the United States.

B. Grand Connection Artist Approval

Scott MacDonald reminded the Commissioners that the Grand Connection is a pedestrian corridor stretching from Meydenbauer Bay Park through downtown Bellevue, across I-405, and connecting to the Eastrail in Wilburton. The most significant missing link is the Grand Connection Crossing, a pedestrian and bicycle bridge over I-405. The city is currently in the early design phase, and the completion of the bridge project is expected by the end of the decade. While certain design elements have changed over time, the overall project vision remains the same.

The Grand Connection aims to be more than a bridge; it is designed as an experience that includes architectural features, interactive spaces, and public art elements. The project will incorporate both permanent and temporary art installations, cultural programming, and immersive experiences to activate the space. Without artistic input, the area would be largely defined by standard architectural and engineering elements.

Scott MacDonald said the artist scope consists of three primary tasks: developing an art plan that establishes guiding principles, identifies artistic themes, and outlines permanent and temporary art opportunities; creating a preliminary artwork concept that provides a scalable vision for the crossing, ranging from a \$300,000 project to a \$2 million installation; and contributing to the overall design by integrating artistic elements throughout the space.

The artist selection process attracted 20 applicants, a lower number than usual due to the high complexity of working on a bridge spanning I-405. A seven-person panel that included Chair Aldrich selected four finalists for interviews. Extensive reference checks were conducted, and the panel reached a near-unanimous decision to select artist Matthew Mazzotta. Key factors in the selection of the artist included the artist's approach to community outreach and past work in Croatia and at Tampa International Airport. The artist is based in Massachusetts and is affiliated with both Harvard and MIT as a professor. The artist has won numerous international awards and holds degrees from the Art Institute of Chicago and MIT. The panel picked up on the fact that the artist has a material- and form-agnostic approach and has a strong focus on community engagement and local storytelling.

The Commissioners were shown pictures of work by Mazzotta in Croatia called *Pier Share*, which was to be an individual artwork. Instead, the artist chose to commission seven local artists to produce site-specific works along a pier that had been previously inaccessible to the public. The project integrated the local sheep-farming culture by involving wool in the artworks and the creation of a paddock to foster interaction between the community and the animals. Mazzotta's projects emphasize deep community involvement, workshops, and interactive experiences that connect local traditions to artistic expression. The Commissioners were also shown several pictures of the artist's work that illustrated the integration of public art into the social and cultural fabric of the place.

Also shared with the Commissioners were pictures of additional examples of the artist's work, including *Open House* in York, Alabama, a house designed to unfold into a 100-seat community theater. The structure can be relocated to different sites, enabling cultural events throughout the city. In Nebraska, the artist repurposed an old false-front garage into a small theater where the community regularly gathers for film screenings. Mazzotta has also worked on more architectural and permanent installations. *Cloud House*, located in a community park, features a cloud-like structure that collects rainwater and releases it onto a tin roof when people sit below, creating an immersive auditory experience that evokes the sound of rainfall. A Los Angeles project, *Raft and Sunbeams*, was presented as an example of the artist's material-agnostic approach. The work features a sunscape made of dichroic glass that changes color throughout the day, integrating natural light into the experience. In Boise, Idaho, Mazzotta created a large pink tree installation, which quickly became a community landmark. Each disc on the tree is independently suspended, allowing the structure to sway in the wind like real leaves. A bench hanging from the tree further enhances its interactive appeal.

One of the artist's most recognized works, *Home*, which is located at Tampa International Airport, features a massive flamingo sculpture extending from the floor to the ceiling. The strategic use of reflective panels and lighting creates an illusion of being underwater, providing travelers with a unique, immersive experience. The name of the work was chosen through a community-driven process that involved over 100,000 people.

Scott MacDonald said the staff are in complete agreement with the selection committee's selection of Matthew Mazzotta, whose works are bold, experiential, and often interactive, which will be an ideal fit for the Grand Connection crossing. The artist's ability to integrate temporary installations and research into the design process was seen as a valuable asset for Bellevue. All the references collected describe the artist as a highly collaborative, flexible, and responsible artist, which reinforces confidence in the ability of the artist to manage the complex Grand Connection project.

Contracting is underway. Jumping into project orientation will involve significant outreach to community groups, including Eastrail Partners. A period of extensive community engagement will follow, leading to the development of a draft plan. The Public Art Committee will review and potentially recommend a preliminary public art concept for the Commission to endorse.

Commissioner Enomoto voiced excitement about Mazzotta's engagement style, noting that the artist's academic background at MIT might resonate well with Bellevue's tech-driven community. The importance of highlighting the intersection of art, technology, and local cultural narratives, such as the Japanese American experience, was emphasized. However, concern was raised concerning how the project will adapt to potential material shortages or changing deadlines. Scott MacDonald acknowledged that public projects often face shifting deadlines and budget constraints. The team has structured the contracting process in phases to allow for flexibility. Design contracts are signed first, followed by fabrication contracts, which occur years later when material costs and timelines are clearer. The city has amended contracts in the past to account for economic fluctuations, ensuring that projects remain feasible while preserving artistic integrity.

Commissioner Enomoto addressed the challenge of synchronizing artwork completion with the construction of the bridge itself. Since the infrastructure is not yet built, there is potential for storage needs if the artwork is ready before installation. Scott MacDonald said it is unlikely that the artwork will not be part of the bridge itself, but even so, the project team is considering contract stipulations to manage any uncertainty.

Chair Aldredge expressed strong enthusiasm for Mazzotta, noting that Mazzotta's interview stood out as particularly compelling, with a demonstration of humility, authenticity, and a deep commitment to community engagement. Unlike other candidates who spoke in general terms about community participation, Mazzotta's past projects show a tangible, genuine approach and a willingness to delegate portions of his own commissions to local artists, as seen in Croatia, exemplifying a belief in collaborative creation. The panel was particularly excited about Mazzotta's potential to engage diverse communities, including those that may not typically participate in public art initiatives, with an approach that often involves creating informal gathering spaces and facilitating direct community input.

Commissioner Chen asked how the non-local artist would engage with the Bellevue community. Scott MacDonald confirmed that the artist will have a travel budget and spend time locally to ensure meaningful engagement. The artist has, in the past, utilized a community engagement method involving outdoor living rooms and installations, sometimes as simple as public seating, to engage with the public. Where language barriers existed, Mazzotta effectively facilitated discussions through local interpreters, reinforcing an approach aimed at integrating community input into projects.

Scott MacDonald said the project's timeline is dependent on how the bridge design proceeds. The draft plan is expected in September or October, and there is hope that public engagement can take place during the summer. The goal is to give the artist enough time for community input before the design of the bridge progresses too far.

Regarding funding and project scope, it was noted that there is no set budget yet. The art plan is a separately funded component, covering design and identifying opportunities for multiple artists. While one sizeable central artwork is anticipated, the project could also incorporate smaller installations, ensuring continuity along the crossing. The plan will outline key locations for murals, performances, and other artistic elements.

C. Proposed Donation of *Builders III* by Jacob Lawrence

Lorie Hoffman explained that Jerry and Charlene Lee, the same donors who previously donated a sculpture to City Hall, are offering a lithograph as a donation. The Commission was tasked with reviewing and voting to accept it into the Public Art Collection.

Jacob Lawrence was a highly significant artist in American history who grew up in Harlem and gained prominence through work with the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Lawrence was one of the first African American artists to be represented by a New York gallery before later moving to the Pacific Northwest to teach at the University of Washington. The artist passed away in Seattle in 2000.

The value of *Builders III* at its last appraisal was approximately \$12,500. The work is part of a series and is an artist-proof rather than a numbered edition. It has been well-preserved and features rich colors, demonstrating the technical complexity of lithography. The piece aligns well with the city's mission of promoting diverse artistic representation.

Regarding installation and maintenance, given that the work is a framed lithograph, installation costs would be minimal, though framing may need to be reassessed. The piece is expected to be prominently displayed at City Hall or Mini City Hall to maximize public visibility. Given the artist's renown, additional security measures will need to be considered.

A motion to accept the donation was made by Commissioner Enomoto. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Chen and the motion carried unanimously.

The Commissioners expressed gratitude to Jerry and Charlene Lee, recognizing their civic generosity. They noted that the contribution would add significant value to the public collection. The donors sought to make the piece accessible, contrasting it with similar works housed in private institutions with restricted access.

5. **Commission Quick Business** – None

6. **Reports**

A. Commissioner's Committee and Lead Reports – None

B. Project Updates from Staff

Scott MacDonald reported that work is underway to prepare for the installation of Po Shu Wang's artwork at 130th Avenue NE and Spring Boulevard. The foundation for the light rail-adjacent artwork is scheduled for installation in May, with the artwork installation later in the year.

Lorie Hoffman shared that routine conservation and maintenance efforts regarding the art collection will begin in the coming months, ensuring the city's public art remains well-preserved.

It was noted that the recently purchased artworks for the Public Art Collection are now fully acquired and undergoing framing. An exhibition will be held at City Hall in June or July, and a public reception is planned.

All 2025 Grant Program recipients have been confirmed and are beginning project planning. Future Commission meetings will feature short presentations from organizations that are receiving funding.

7. **Adjournment**

Chair Aldredge adjourned the meeting at 5:44 PM.



City of Bellevue staff liaison

4/23/25

Date