

Bellevue Arts Commission Meeting Minutes

November 5, 2025
4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
1E-113 and Virtual

Commissioners Present:	Vice Chair Enomoto, Commissioners Bhargava, Chen, Hazra, Martinez, McIntyre
Commissioners Remote:	None
Commissioners Absent:	Chairperson Aldredge
Staff Present:	Manette Stamm, Lorie Hoffman, Community Development
Others Present:	Not Present
Recording Secretary:	Gerry Lindsay

I. **Call To Order**

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m. by Vice Chair Enomoto, who presided. All Commissioners were present with the exception of Chair Aldredge.

2. **Approval of Agenda and Minutes**

A. Approval of Agenda

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

B. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the September 3, 2025, minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner McIntyre. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bhargava and the motion carried unanimously.

3. **Oral Communications** – None

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

A. 2026 Project Grants

Arts Program Analyst Manette Stamm explained that the Project Grants program provides funding for arts, culture, and heritage projects that serve Bellevue residents and visitors. For 2026, the grant request levels increased from \$1,000, \$2,000 and \$3,000 to \$3,000, \$5,000 and \$7,000. These awards are all-or-nothing, with the intention of enabling applicants to plan projects realistically, rather than having to significantly scale down projects if awarded only a fraction of their requested amount. Applicants will also be able to request an additional \$1,000 BelRed bonus if their project directly supports and takes place in the BelRed Arts District.

The Eastside Arts Partnership Support Grants program continues its two-year cycle and requires no new review, as all current grantees will continue into their second year without change to their award, pending confirmation of their eligibility.

Manette Stamm stated that the project grant award recommendations were developed by the Allocations Committee, which consisted of Commissioners Martínez and McIntyre, along with Era Pogosova, who is part of the BelRed Arts District Community Alliance. The increased funding tiers led to a dramatic rise in applications, reaching 67, with a total request of \$464,000 —a 394 percent increase from the previous year. The Allocations Committee recommended awarding \$187,000 to 31 projects, along with \$13,000 in BelRed bonuses, for a total distribution of \$200,000, which is 43 percent of the total requested funds. A breakdown of the types of projects was shared with the Commissioners. It was noted that there is some overlap among the categories of educational programs, exhibitions, festivals, performances, and workshops.

Commissioner McIntyre expressed appreciation for the effort taken by all the applicants in submitting applications and affirmed that the Allocation Committee's review process was thoughtful and thorough. Manette Stamm was thanked for organizing the review process. The recipients represent a solid cross-section of arts-related activities that will benefit the city in the coming year.

Commissioner Martínez expressed positive remarks about the diversity and creativity reflected in the proposals, noting that many of the applicants appeared unfamiliar with the Bellevue Arts District, which suggests a need for clearer guidance or outreach. There were some broader questions regarding what art is, what culture is, and what entertainment is. Those issues may warrant discussion in future planning.

Vice Chair Enomoto asked if the significant surge in the number of applications was the result of a new marketing strategy or outreach. Manette Stamm said the primary cause appears to be the increased maximum award amounts, which allow applicants to pursue projects more feasibly. There was no change in the marketing strategy.

Arts Community Manager Lorie Hoffman observed that the increase in the number of applications likely also reflects the increased costs of producing arts and culture events. The award levels had not changed for a couple of decades. There is a need for grant levels to remain relevant, considering those expenses.

Vice Chair Enomoto inquired whether there had been an improvement in the quality of the applications in terms of content. Manette Stamm said it would be difficult to comment on quality, but did note that there was a noticeable increase in the number of applicants using AI-generated language. While AI can serve as a helpful drafting tool, it should not be used by applicants as an excuse to avoid writing their own applications. Some applications appeared to rely too heavily on direct AI-generated responses, to the detriment of authenticity and clarity.

Vice Chair Enomoto reiterated the need for applicants to ensure the language in their submissions reflects their own voice and mission.

Commissioner Bhargava inquired whether the applicants had been informed in advance that the grant awards would be issued on an all-or-nothing basis. Manette Stamm confirmed that they were.

Commissioner Bhargava commented on the significant increase in applications and noted that personal outreach through social media may have contributed to the high volume of applications. Manette Stamm allowed that many of those who applied were first-time applicants. It is common for newer applicants to make multiple attempts before being awarded the grant. The comments from the reviewers are made available to the applicants, and that may help them strengthen future submissions.

Commissioner Chen commented that AI tools can help bridge language barriers for cultural organizations with limited English proficiency and suggested offering guidance on how to use such tools effectively when writing grant applications. Commissioner Chen also proposed developing clearer data on the distribution of awards across various artistic categories, including cultural festivals, visual arts, digital arts, and performance art, to help the Commission understand how funding is allocated and to better support diversity in the future. Manette Stamm acknowledged that categorization could be helpful but stressed that the application forms are intentionally kept as short as possible. A simple selection question could be added in the future to support a more detailed analysis. There is some overlap with the city's cross-cultural grants program, which does a good job of collecting similar data.

Vice Chair Enomoto suggested it might be helpful to publish the percentage breakdowns by category.

Commissioner Martínez remarked that while such data could be useful, it should not be used to mandate quotas or restrict the committee's discretion. Manette Stamm agreed and affirmed that funding decisions must remain grounded in evaluation criteria such as artistic merit, public benefit, and feasibility rather than predetermined percentages.

Commissioner Bhargava asked if the Commission has access to any analytics about the projects that are funded. Manette Stamm confirmed that grantees must submit reports that include attendance and participation numbers to receive reimbursement. Commissioner Bhargava asked if the reports from the applicants were publicly available. Manette Stamm allowed that the entire packet is public information, as are all the conversations held at Commission and City Council meetings. The applications are also public records that could be sought through a public records request, but any personal information would be redacted. Commissioner Bhargava suggested that first-time applicants could benefit from seeing submitted applications and reviewing how questions are answered. Manette Stamm noted that office hours are available for any applicant who wants an informal review of their draft materials. General guidance was provided, but there was no evaluation of its quality. After the reviews are completed, applicants may access the summarized reviewer comments.

Commissioner Hazra said there was great visibility of the grant opportunity. The increased outreach encouraged new applicants. Lorie Hoffman allowed that much of the effective outreach had come from Commission members spreading the word within the community.

The chair then called for a motion on whether to recommend approval of the 2026 Project Grants as recommended by the Allocations Committee. A motion to approve was made and seconded, and the commission voted unanimously in favor.

B. Confirmed Committee Assignments

Staff noted that the assignments remain the same as those established in September and provided the list for reference. No questions or concerns were raised.

C. Cultural Facilities Grants – Progress Update

Manette Stamm reported that the first year of the two-year program was nearing its first full year. The program was funded at \$1.8 million over the two-year period and received a total of \$22.7 million in funding requests. The Allocations Committee's recommendations, previously approved by both the Arts Commission and City Council, resulted in awards to five applicants. All the grantees are now either fully under contract or in the final stage of contract execution, a milestone staff aims to see completed by the end of the year.

Manette Stamm informed the Commission that the KidsQuest Children's Museum, which received a \$400,000 award, had completed the renovations to the Water Room exhibit and reopened in August. The grant has been fully closed out. It was acknowledged that KidsQuest had recently been in the news regarding its eventual relocation. The fact is, it will take a considerable amount of time to implement the move, given the necessary upgrades at the new facility. The improvements funded with grant dollars will serve the organization for several more years, meeting the program's required use duration before any relocation occurs.

Theater33 received two awards: a capital project grant of \$462,500 for the construction of their theater and an additional maintenance grant to install an HVAC system. The organization has completed most of its facility construction, and the grant funds will reimburse all eligible expenses incurred between 2023 and 2026. The HVAC installation was necessary due to extreme heat in the building during summer programming. The installation work was an appropriate expense because the building owner was not obligated to provide air conditioning.

The American Asian Performing Arts Theater was awarded \$600,000 to support the construction of a new dance studio. Manette Stamm reported that the organization is actively moving through the city permitting process and expects to break ground early in 2026. Because the total project cost is significantly higher than the grant amount, staff will continue to coordinate closely to ensure that eligible expenses are incurred while the grant program remains active.

Carlson Theater at Bellevue College received grant funds to complete upgrades to the lighting system and seating. The focus is on making the venue more accessible to community users. The college has established a defined process for rental requests and has dedicated personnel to oversee community access. A guide to the facilities and rental contact information is available online.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Chen, Manette Stamm confirmed that all capital facility grant contracts will expire at the end of 2026, and the grantees must complete all eligible work and submit reimbursement requests by that time. Limited contract extensions may be considered, but only under extraordinary circumstances.

Lorie Hoffman stated that the next application cycle for the capital facility program has not yet been scheduled, but preliminary planning will commence early in 2026. The likely timeline is that the next grant period will support projects occurring in 2027 and 2028.

Commissioner Chen noted that other governmental agencies also offer HVAC-related grants. Manette Stamm recognized the importance of coordinating timelines with

external funding sources to enable grantees to effectively leverage multiple funding streams.

5. **Commission Quick Business**

A. Next Meeting Date

Manette Stamm proposed meeting next on December 3. Confirming that there would be a quorum, the meeting was scheduled for that date.

B. Parliamentary Procedures Training

Manette Stamm said the training session on ethics and the Open Public Meetings Act is available via recording. Commissioners who attended the live training should notify Karin Roberts to fulfill the four-year requirement. An optional training session covering parliamentary procedures is scheduled for Monday, December 8. The in-person session will include dinner at 5:30 p.m. and the training from 6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. It will cover motions, deliberations, and other practical applications of Robert's Rules of Order. Attendance tracking is not required for the session, and while lengthy, the training is designed to be accessible and engaging.

6. **Reports**

A. Project Updates from Staff

Turning to staff project updates, staff reported that final reports for 2025 grants are due November 30, after which the program will close. Projects extending beyond that date may submit a report now for payment within the fiscal window and provide an updated report upon completion. In the BelRed Arts District, the Arts District Community Alliance hosted an open house on October 25 for a new studio space featuring 11 artist studios, with plans to offer these studios at discounted rates.

The Council received an updated report on the Economic Development Plan in September. There may be a short delay in getting the plan fully executed through the Council; it is likely to be in the first quarter of 2026. Otherwise, everything is on track. The six-year cultural and economic development plan includes creative economy initiatives such as the Arts District work.

Lorie Hoffman reported that *Yonder Sky* by Po Xu Wang, located at 130th Avenue NE and Spring Boulevard, is fully installed and operating; its interactive sound and light elements are particularly prominent during the darker months.

The Commissioners were encouraged to view *Longboat Reed Rookery*, located outside City Hall, by Dan Corson. Its color-changing program can best be seen and enjoyed after dusk.

Rooted by Jill Anholt has been fabricated and is being held for installation in coordination with the Transportation Department's trail project linking Spring Boulevard to Eastrail; work is expected to begin in the spring.

In the Crossroads neighborhood, the public artwork titled *River* is fully installed on light poles. The dichroic glass changes color in response to ambient light and casts distinctive shadows during the day; it produces a different effect under illumination at night. Three

pieces are in place and can be found along the pathway from the Bellevue Theater north toward the Pea Patch Garden.

Grand Connection artist Matthew Mazzotta has completed an initial study session with a diverse group of local stakeholders and will next develop a public art plan focused on the Grand Connection, which spans the distance between Meydenbauer Bay Park and Easttrail. The plan being developed will focus specifically on the crossing from City Hall Plaza to Easttrail. Potential sites for future works will be identified, including a piece that the artist may develop in the future. A presentation to the Commission will be offered as the work advances.

Regarding temporary public art projects, Lorie Hoffman stated that the nine-panel works by Bethany Fackrell have been installed along 124th Avenue NE, between the Spring District and the Arts District. The inauguration of the works featured music, poetry, and a community ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The 2025 maintenance program for the collection has been completed. Thirty of the fifty-seven permanent outdoor works received treatment during the year. The remainder of the works are scheduled for maintenance in 2027. One major piece, the upturned tree form at City Hall, will require a revised approach due to estimates coming in higher than expected. Overall, however, the collection is in good condition.

Lorie Hoffman reported that the offer by KidsQuest Children's Museum to purchase the Bellevue Arts Museum building has been accepted. They are currently engaged in a due diligence period. Closing on the sale is anticipated to occur in the first quarter of 2026. KidsQuest will maintain operations at its current site during the design and code upgrade work on the new facility. The Bellevue Arts Museum has affirmed the continuation of its Art Fair, with the 2026 event proceeding as planned. KidsQuest will undertake the necessary upgrades and maintenance work to ensure the museum building is up to code and ready to begin construction of its exhibits. The museum has consistently demonstrated transparency throughout the process.

Commissioner Chen referenced the Economic Development Plan and voiced support for having the plan identify arts, culture, and entertainment as a strategic priority. The question asked was how the city would define its focus across various domains, including sports, outdoor activities, and music. Lorie Hoffman explained that the Economic Development Plan, by design, frames arts through a creative economy lens. The city intends to resume a cultural planning process in 2027. The last cultural plan, the Cultural Compass, was adopted in 2004 and is now fully retired. Work on the Economic Development Plan must be completed before taking on the new task.

7. Adjournment

Vice Chair Enomoto adjourned the meeting at 5:25 p.m.

City of Bellevue staff liaison

Date