

## CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

Briefing on the future Grand Connection public art installation at the Downtown Park NE Gateway

Paul Manfredi, Chair, Bellevue Arts Commission

Mac Cummins, Director, 452-6191

Jesse Canedo, Chief Economic Development Officer, 452-5236

*Community Development Department*

## DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL

### INFORMATION ONLY

Tonight's study session will provide an update on the signature art installation being developed for the new Downtown Park NE Gateway.

## RECOMMENDATION

N/A

## BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

### History and Background

In 2015, Council approved the *Grand Connection Framework Plan*, establishing a vision for a non-motorized corridor connecting Meydenbauer Bay through downtown Bellevue and Downtown Park to the Eastside Rail Corridor (now Eastrail). The Council also adopted the companion *Arts and Cultural Plan* for the Grand Connection, which recommended key actions and strategies to support art and cultural development along the route. In adopting these documents, City Council expressed support for bold, visionary public spaces and art elements in the core of downtown Bellevue.

In particular, the *Grand Connection Framework Plan* and its companion *Arts and Cultural Plan* identify the northeast corner of Downtown Park as a "key gateway for Bellevue and the Grand Connection route...[and] an important transition from Downtown Bellevue into a more intimate environment of the park and ultimately Old Bellevue." The Plan identifies this location as an opportunity to create a gateway between the bustling intersection and Downtown Park suggesting that, along with a new corner plaza and water feature to help activate the corner, a major public art element could further enliven the gateway. Additional policy support for new, iconic public art in the downtown core was expressed by Council in 2017 and 2018 through work on the *Destination Development Plan* and *Downtown Livability* planning and code adoption process.

After funds were allocated for a major art piece as part of the 2019-2020 budget process, the Community Development and Parks Department formed an artist selection committee, which included City staff, the Downtown Park NE Gateway design team, arts professionals, and the Chairs from both the Arts Commission and the Park Board. An open request for qualifications (RFQ) was issued on October 11, 2017 and closed on November 3, 2017. After reviewing 98 artist submittals and interviewing three finalists, the committee selected Marc Fornes / THEVERYMANY. In January 2018, this selection was approved by the Bellevue Arts Commission. Upon approval, the artist worked collaboratively with the NE Gateway design team, Arts staff, the Arts Commission, and others to

integrate the proposed art installation into the site plan.

### **Integrated Art Design**

Downtown Park's northeast corner entrance is an important physical and aesthetic connection to downtown Bellevue, serving as a focal point for the City's Grand Connection from Meydenbauer Bay Park to the Wilburton area. The intersection of Bellevue Way and NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street is one of the busiest in the City for pedestrians and cars, with many coming and going from Bellevue Square, Downtown Park, and other downtown destinations. According to the Bellevue Transportation Department, thousands of pedestrians and more than 35,000 vehicles pass through the intersection on an average weekday. Counts are significantly higher during major events like the Bellevue Family 4<sup>th</sup> celebration, Snowflake Lane, and the Bellevue ArtsFair. This makes the intersection an important gateway for visitors, residents, and downtown employees alike, and an ideal location for one of Bellevue's landmark artworks.

Through 2018 and into early 2019, the site and artwork designs were advanced in close collaboration between the Parks and Community Services Department's NE Gateway design team and the artist. Unlike many public art commissions across the country, this signature artwork will be completely unique to Bellevue and to this site; the gateway plaza and the artwork are intended to work in tandem with each other. Marc Fornes' iconic design integrates a pavilion with an elevated canopy of organic circles of different sizes, up to 25 feet in diameter and supported by thin metal rods. The motifs evoke a forest canopy and the dappled light of the forest floor, reinforcing Bellevue's identity as a City in a Park. The artist intends for the pavilion to act as a beacon to be seen from Bellevue Way and NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street and frame the viewpoint at the top of the promenade connecting the entry plaza to the Grand Circle. The use of an integrated approach to the groundscape, terrain, and seating options means that the pavilion could support informal uses, such as small events (like birthday parties), or serve as a stage for intimate performances.

On April 9, 2019, the Bellevue Arts Commission approved the conceptual design for the art installation. Commissioners expressed particular support for the use of a pavilion-like structure, which allows for weather protection and small events and gatherings.

### **Delivery Timeline**

In December 2017, Marc Fornes / THEVERYMANY was selected from a pool of 98 applicants by a panel of community members, professional artists, and a member of the Bellevue Arts Commission.

Following contracting in 2018, in early 2019, artwork concept design began, with close collaboration between the park design team, resulting in an integrated art and park design. On June 11, 2019, the artist presented concepts for discussion at a joint meeting of the Parks & Community Services Board and the Arts Commission.

On September 10, 2019, the Arts Commission voted to approve the final artwork design.

Once the contract is approved by City Council, engineering and fabrication will begin. Construction of the NE Gateway site elements is targeted for completion by early 2021, at which point the artwork will be installed. Construction and installation is scheduled for completion by either the end of the first quarter of 2021 or the beginning of the second quarter of 2021. Upon completion, the new park

entrance will open with a celebration event, including a presentation by the artist.



## POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

### Policy Impact

This action does not modify policy, but aligns with implementation of several existing policies:

- *Grand Connection Framework Plan.* The Grand Connection Framework Plan identifies the NE Gateway to Downtown Park as a major public art opportunity site. Further, the plan develops a vision to connect Meydenbauer Bay through Downtown Park, across I-405 to the Wilburton area. This public art site plays a major role in this connection, and this contract implements that vision.
- *Grand Connection Arts & Cultural Plan.* The Grand Connection Arts & Cultural Plan identifies the NE Gateway to Downtown Park as a major public art opportunity site.
- *Destination Development Plan.* Bellevue’s 2018 Destination Development Plan identifies two major strategic priorities: 1) “Branding Bellevue,” which focuses on increasing the visibility and uniqueness of Bellevue as a destination; and 2) “Enhancing the Bellevue visitor experience,” which focuses on tactics like increased downtown events, public space, and public art.
- *Downtown Livability.* Downtown Livability, Bellevue’s most recent update to the downtown subarea plan and land use code, was adopted by Council in 2017. The plan highlights a vision of downtown as the “heart of the Eastside,” and a hub for “cultural, entertainment, residential, and regional uses.” Further, several policy statements identify the importance of public art and cultural uses:
  - **S-DT-56.** Differentiate Downtown Districts through streetscape improvements such as wayfinding elements, gateways, mid-block pedestrian crossings, public art, landscaping and street trees, lighting, and street furniture.
  - **S-DT-112.** Complete the phased development of Downtown Park, and enhance its visual and functional presence on Bellevue Way.
- *Bellevue Comprehensive Plan.* This project aligns with the Urban Design & The Arts element of the Bellevue Comprehensive Plan. It directly aligns with the following policies:

- **UD-17.** Support and encourage a variety of artwork in public places, such as parks, public buildings, and plazas.
- **UD-18.** Expand the City’s public art collection and involve the community through City programs and private partnerships.
- **UD-21.** Support and encourage the development of the Grand Connection as a cultural corridor by designing and creating spaces for performance, installation, and temporary-based art and cultural installations.

**Fiscal Impact**

This project is fully funded as part of the 2019-2025 Capital Investment Program.

**OPTIONS**

N/A

**ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS**

- A. Summary of minutes from Bellevue Arts Commission design approval
- B. Artwork renderings and site plan (Marc Fornes / THEVERYMANY)

**AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY**

N/A