

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

Arts and Culture Program Biannual Update — update on the program's activities.

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DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL**INFORMATION
ONLY**

Tonight's Study Session will provide Council with an update of the City's recent arts and cultural activities, including updates on existing programs and upcoming projects, pandemic impacts and recovery and the progress in implementing the arts, cultural and creative economy strategies of the 2020 Economic Development Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

This Council item is a biannual update on ongoing programs of the City's Arts and Culture Program.

Activities of the Arts and Culture Program are primarily guided by three key Council-adopted plans – the 2004 Cultural Compass, Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan and the 2020 Economic Development Plan. These plans layout the foundation and the role of the City in supporting and catalyzing arts, cultural and creative activity. Additional key plans that inform work and programs include the Grand Connection Framework Plan and the Destination Development Plan.

Collectively, these plans demonstrate the City's long commitment to fostering and supporting arts and cultural activity. They illustrate that arts and cultural activities are key strategies toward sustaining and growing Bellevue's community and economic vitality. Specifically, these plans include strategies that grow the creative economy, expand the City's public art collection, expand arts education and access to cultural events for all residents, establish the BelRed Arts District, support artists and cultural organizations in the creation and presentation of artwork, and that anchor arts and cultural events as key drivers of tourism, employee attraction and retention.

In order to implement the policies and cultural plans, the Arts Program maintains a variety of operations: 1) Annual Arts Grants; 2) Public Art production and maintenance; 3) the annual Bellwether arts festival; 4) capacity building and partnerships with private and non-profit partners; 5) implementation work for the Arts District; and 6) cultural planning. Additionally, staff contributes to Citywide planning initiatives, produces and supports events, plays a leadership role in the Eastside's and region's cultural sectors, and supports the Bellevue Arts Commission.

Q2 2021 PROGRAM SUMMARY

In 2020 into 2021, the arts and cultural community that the Program serves, has been dominated by two key issues. The COVID pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for the arts and cultural sector, specifically, the acute and deep economic impacts have threatened the sustainability of many artists and organizations. Additionally, consistent with Council's leadership, a desire to promote and support diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is being discussed within most organizations and by many artists and audiences. These two issues, the pandemic and DEI, are important lenses to employ in a review of the work of the Arts and Culture Program.

A 2020 survey showed 82 percent of respondents attended arts and cultural experiences in Bellevue. While the Eastside's community sees Bellevue as the cultural heart of the Eastside, this status could be difficult to continue as economic pressures and lack of affordable space continue to put pressures on the arts and cultural sector. Bellevue's support for arts and culture has helped alleviate some of those pressures, but price inflation and property redevelopment are accelerating faster than the community's investments. Growing partnerships and investments will be important for maintaining Bellevue's cultural sector.

PROGRESS ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN: The Economic Development Plan includes strategies that support the following focus areas: Capacity Building and Partnerships, Small Business and Entrepreneurship, Workforce, Retail, Creative Economy, and Tourism. While arts and cultural activities, including creative businesses, artists (often sole-proprietors), arts and cultural nonprofits, and creative economy industries, play a role in all of these focus areas, this update is focused on progress made in the Creative Economy and Tourism focus areas.

Creative Economy: The Economic Development Plan includes strategies that encourage linkages between the traditional and digital creative sectors, establishment of the BelRed Arts District, and expanding festivals and events to promote Bellevue's creative brand. Highlights of progress made on these strategies include:

- Linkages between traditional and digital creative sectors: new to Bellwether this year will be a digital art gallery feature 10 digital artworks by a mix of artists either new to the intersection of art and technology or well-established histories of technology sector collaboration.
- Establishment of the BelRed Arts District: the Arts and Culture Program is working to strengthen the built and institutional infrastructure needed for the BelRed Arts District to thrive. Efforts include:
 - **Making art more visible:** By the fall of 2021, up to 15 utility boxes will be wrapped with art by local artists, and by 2023, two new major public art projects, one on 130th and Spring and another at 121st and Spring, will be installed in BelRed. Together, this public art will enliven the district while also providing visible early signaling that art is an integral component of BelRed.
 - **Build capacity and convene stakeholders:**
 - BelRed Arts District Engagement Report: Bellevue worked with artist Katie Miller to compile research and outreach data to better understand potential strategies to support the district. This included a survey of over 200 individuals with connections

to BelRed, one-on-one interviews with stakeholders and research compiled into a report. This is the first step in developing an BelRed Arts District strategic plan.

- BelRed Arts District Implementation Plan: By the fall of 2021, the Arts and Culture Program will launch a cultural planning effort to work with the community to develop strategies for further establishment of the BelRed Arts District. One key desired outcome is that a community group will be established to focus on the promotion, growth, and sustainability of the BelRed Arts District, similar to the Bellevue Downtown Association.
- Arts Market Survey: Later this year, the City will survey the community's needs for affordable space for arts and cultural activity. Called an Arts Market Survey, cities and developers have used data from these surveys to develop affordable housing for artists and cultural workers, performance and practice spaces, office spaces, and space for cultural, arts, and creative businesses and organizations. Similar efforts have led to a variety of projects across the Puget Sound region including Everett's Schack Arts Center, which includes 40 affordable artist live/work units and community meeting and gallery spaces, and the Mount Baker Lofts at Sound Transit's Mount Baker station. These developments are important for ensuring affordable access to cultural spaces and for ensuring that individuals supporting the arts can continue to live in the Arts District. In these types of developments, an 'artist' is defined broadly to encapsulate everyone from an arts educator, a culinary or visual artist to a designer. If a project in Bellevue is feasible, it could provide homes and community spaces for arts teachers at Bellevue School District or graphic designers at local companies, as long as they meet income requirements.
- Expanding festivals and events: The pandemic has caused enormous hardships, and in most cases, cancellation, of major festivals and events. For smaller festivals and events, which includes many of the events to which Bellevue provides grants, most were able to move their events online and experienced increased attendance compared to in-person events. Looking forward, smaller festivals and events, that often specifically serve more diverse communities don't appear to face significant challenges in relaunching programs cancelled or moved online in 2020 and 2021. In contrast, many larger events in the region experienced significant losses from cancelling in 2020. Therefore, startup costs for larger events could be an issue for some events and festivals in 2021 and beyond. There also could be a strategic benefit in elevating events as there are fewer fulfilling that need. In Bellevue, the city is working to expand Bellwether in 2021 to take advantage of a lack of competition to market Bellevue as a creative place to an audience looking for something to do.

Cultural Tourism Supports Broader Tourism Industry: The plan includes a strategy for developing more activities to promote tourism. Current and planned work that implement this strategy includes:

- Advising Visit Bellevue on their tourism promotion activities.
- Continuing to grow Bellwether through new event offerings and increased awareness of the show.
- Supporting arts and cultural events via the Arts Grants Program.

- Creating interesting places, like the coming Downtown Park NE Gateway Artwork, that will generate tourism and help to define Bellevue as a dynamic “must see” experience.

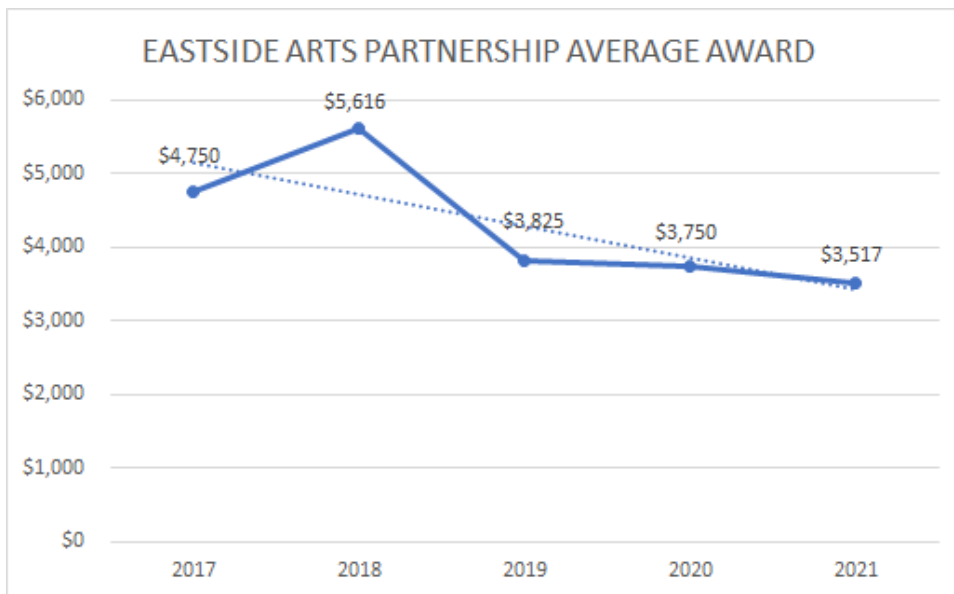
ARTS GRANTS PROGRAM: The Arts and Culture Program administers Bellevue’s grants program for public serving arts and cultural activities. The grants program provides roughly 45 grants per year. More than any other outcome, these grants provide Bellevue’s community affordable, if not free, access to arts and cultural education programs, collaborations between artists and our community, diverse arts and cultural events and others. In 2020, a year with unprecedented challenges in the community and for artists and organizations, granted arts and cultural programs provided over 87,000 free and reduced tickets to the community.

Current and past examples of awarded grants include:

- Village Theatre’s Pied Piper Educational Program, that serves 7,380 Eastside K-8 students of which Bellevue children make up roughly 6,700 of the students, providing professional touring theatre productions and in-school workshops;
- The Chinese Lunar New Year celebration featuring 100+ local and international performers by the Asian American Performing Arts Theatre (AAPAT);
- Support for KidsQuest’s 2021 virtual, off- and on-site arts programming;
- Tasveer’s multi-week virtual and in-person South Asian Film Festival including film screenings and post-film Q & A sessions and film industry panels, many of which are free to all or free to those without resources; and
- Pacific Northwest Ballet’s school and summer educational programs free to Bellevue School District students at schools serving underserved communities within Bellevue.

Recognizing that these types of grants create opportunities, not just for artists and organizations but also for the communities they serve, staff is working with the Arts Commission to review the current grants program utilizing an equity lens to identify potential updates to the grant guidelines, and other options to remove barriers to equity and inclusion in the program. This follows the clear support for advancing diversity, equity and inclusion expressed by City Council and throughout all levels of the City organization.

The increased focus on equity and access will grow in the coming years as the City strives to serve a growing and diversifying population and arts community. The number of applicants for arts grants has increased by 20 percent since 2017 while average grants have decreased by nearly \$1,200 due to budget constraints. This funding makes many of Bellevue’s smaller events possible by lowering the fundraising burden that many smaller and diversity-focused organizations would be unable to overcome on their own.



Continued support for these community grants is important for community building and economic development as they provide significant returns for the community, including:

- Supporting tourism growth – Nationwide, 68 percent of travelers attended an arts and cultural event on their trip ([Americans for the Arts](#)).
- Cultural tourism supports local businesses – Non-local attendees of arts and cultural events spent an average of \$47.57 in addition to the cost of their ticket at local businesses compared to \$23.44 spent by local attendees ([Americans for the Arts](#)).
- For every dollar spent by governments on arts and culture it is estimated that they receive roughly \$5.50 in related tax revenue ([Americans for the Arts](#)).

A regional comparison of similar grants programs shows that Bellevue's program is in the middle of the pack. In 2019, Bellevue contributed \$0.84 in per capita arts and cultural grant spending. Neighboring cities like Seattle and Issaquah spend significantly more per capita than Bellevue, while other Eastside cities like Renton and Redmond spend slightly less. Each city uses a different mix of revenue streams to fund its programs and additional research would be needed to determine how they differ from funding mechanisms in Bellevue.

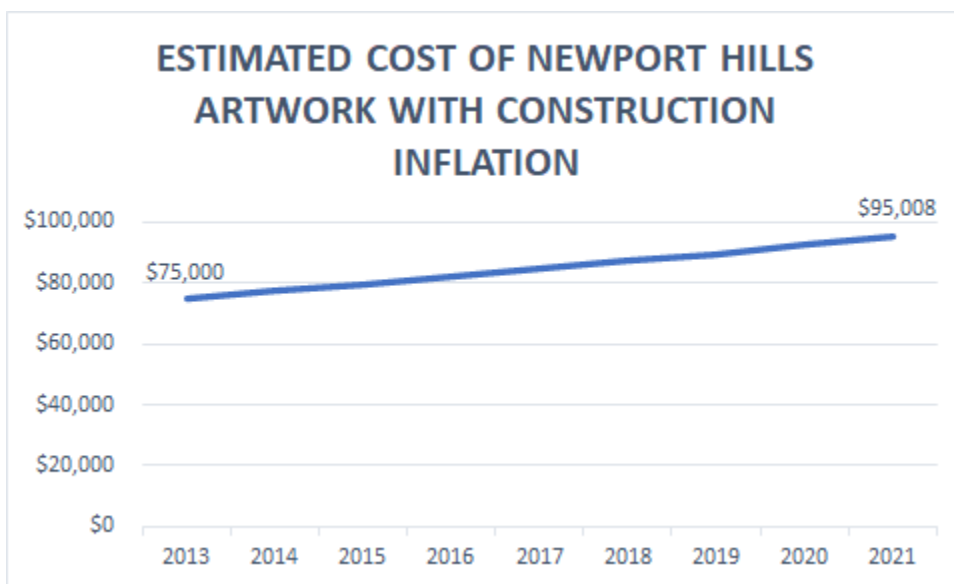
Staff anticipates continued growth in demand for arts & cultural services, as well as grants, as the community continues to grow and diversify. To service that future need, additional funding, public-private partnerships, capacity building for non-profits, and lower cost facilities will be needed.

PUBLIC ART PROGRAM: Many of the projects listed below are ongoing projects started well before the pandemic. For some of these projects, the pandemic has created delays, but not significant interruptions. In some cases, like the 2020 addition of portable artworks to the public art collection, programs were developed directly in response to the pandemic.

Specific opportunities for public art projects are either identified in existing plans or recommended to the Arts Commission for approval. Selection of public artists are done through a panel composed of

equal parts community members and arts professionals, and one arts commissioner. Processes put in place plus additional outreach to a more diverse applicant pool have yielded increased representation of diverse communities in the collection.

Having a set allocation of \$350,000 from the CIP has allowed public art projects to make commitments to long planned projects like the coming Downtown Park NE Corner artwork. That said, the stable funding isn't able to adapt to inflationary pressures that impact the cost of fabrication and construction over time. Key to understanding this issue is a closer look at the impact on the public art program being able to continue to develop projects outside of the landmark projects like the aforementioned Downtown Park NE Corner artwork. Construction inflation varies significantly by region and even by city. In general, nationwide averages in construction cost inflation typically are between 3-5 percent per year. Fabrication of permanent public art projects is closely tied to construction inflation, especially when factoring in the cost of materials, such as steel. To illustrate this impact the ability of the Public Art Program to take on projects, and using a conservative construction inflation estimate of 3 percent, the Newport Hills artwork on 119th, built in 2013 for \$75,000 would today cost over \$95,000, an increase of 27 percent.



Because of this pressure, the Public Art Program has had to take on fewer projects, often focusing on landmark artworks that will boost the City's creative brand and smaller projects that showcase local and artists and attract visitors. In future years, the program will have to reduce the number of medium-sized projects that often help build character in the City's single-family and mixed-use neighborhoods. This is due to a rise in costs on these projects that often include slim margins and are less appealing to artists and fabricators. Medium-sized projects like the Newport Hills 119th artwork are typically neighborhood-based projects.

Recent activity:

Portable Artworks: In 2020 at the height of the pandemic, 20 portable artworks were purchased from local emerging artists. With the goals of increasing representation of local artists in the Public Art

Collection and supporting artists during the pandemic, a panel of community members, arts professionals and an arts commissioner selected works out of over 400 artwork submissions. Purchased artworks dramatically increased diverse representation in the collection. These artworks will be installed in City-owned facilities in the coming months.

Lattawood Park Artwork and Lighting: Completed in early 2021, this artwork by Jim Hirschfield and Sonya Ishii, was integrated into a Neighborhood Enhancement Program path lighting project and features both physical and light-based art elements.

Upcoming activity:

BelRed Utility Box Art Wraps: Artworks will soon begin to appear on up to 15 utility boxes across BelRed. This opportunity was open to Eastside artists registered on the Eastside Artist Roster, a roster managed by Bellevue but open to all Eastside cities for connecting artists with opportunities.

Bellwether 2021: Cancelled in 2020, Bellwether will be back to Downtown this September. It will feature a wide range of visual and performing art across several sites. New to this year is a potential collaboration between the City and EastHUB to develop a series of musical events and assist with sponsor and partnership development.

Downtown Park NE Gateway Artwork: This landmark artwork planned for completion in the fall of 2021 by artist Marc Fornes, will anchor the new plaza entrance at the NE corner of the Downtown Park.

130th Streetscape Artwork: Planned for installation in 2023 at the intersection of Spring Boulevard and 130th, this BelRed artwork by artist Po Shu Wang will be an interactive and technical artwork featuring a “sound bath” where users can trigger a quiet musical collage developed from recordings of BelRed musicians. The contract for the fabrication and installation of this artwork is expected to go to Council for approval near the end of 2021.

121st and Spring Boulevard Artwork: Artist Jill Anholt is currently working to finalize artwork concepts for an artwork to mark the pedestrian route from Spring Boulevard to the 120th light rail station. The artist is developing her concepts with input from groups with historical connections to BelRed including descendants of Bellevue’s Japanese American farmers that farmed in the area prior to their incarceration during World War II. The contract for the fabrication and installation of this artwork is expected to go to Council for approval near the end of 2021 with project completion planned in 2023.

LOOKING AHEAD: Bellevue, with its investments in public art, arts and cultural organizations, events, and strong creative economy will continue to be a place for arts and culture, but there are challenges. The pandemic compounded existing pressures, such as increasing rents and a lack of affordable arts and cultural spaces, making conditions significantly more challenging for many working or operating a business or organization in the arts and cultural sector. Despite that, artists and arts and cultural organizations still see Bellevue as a place where they want to be. This is due to a variety of advantages that Bellevue has throughout the region including its central location on the Eastside, a population that is engaged in arts and cultural activities, the strength and competitiveness of our economy, quality schools, the safety and quality of our built environment and neighborhoods, and our diverse community. Planned work in this summary is targeted to highlight and address challenges while working to catalyze a more vibrant, livable and best-in-class Bellevue.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

N/A

OPTIONS

N/A

ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

N/A

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

Economic Development Plan (adopted 2020)

Grand Connection Framework Plan

Cultural Compass