



STAFF REPORT

City Council

Meeting Date:

11/5/2019

Staff Report Number:

19-226-CC

Regular Business:

Direct City staff to work with Menlo Park Public Art nonprofit to develop a pilot public art project proposal to present to the Parks and Recreation Commission for their consideration and recommendation to City Council

Recommendation

Staff recommends that City Council provide direction on developing a pilot public art project, authorizing staff to negotiate the details of a proposal project with the Menlo Park Public Art (MPPA) nonprofit organization to present to the Parks and Recreation Commission for their consideration and recommendation to the City Council.

Policy Issues

The addition of public art in city parks is consistent with Parks and Recreation facilities master plan recommendations that City Council accepted October 15. City Council authorization is required to allow the city manager to negotiate an agreement with MPPA for the permanent and/or temporary placement of private artwork in and/or on City property with the agreement to be returned to the City Council for final approval.

Background

On October 15, local art gallerist Katharina Powers on behalf of MPPA addressed the City Council regarding her group's interest in advancing a public art program in the City of Menlo Park. As a pilot program, she has identified an abstract sculpture by East Palo Alto artist Oleg Lobynkin called "Talking Heads" for a six-month loan to the City. The piece which made its debut at Burning Man has a seven-by-seven foot base and stands 18-feet tall, weighing 2,000 pounds (Attachment A.) MPPA is recommending exhibiting the art piece on land owned by the City such as in a public park.

MPPA's mission as indicated on their website (Attachment B:) "It is the ambition of MPPA to develop, support and maintain public art that serves the community. The mission includes to educate the public about the importance of public art at its highest level, and to create artwork that deepens the human experience by inspiring the imagination and evoking emotion, as well as providing enjoyment to Menlo Park public spaces.

Public art can be expressed through a wide variety of means. It can be thought-provoking with meaningful and relevant themes. It can be whimsical, bold or fragile. Art addresses societal challenges, connecting our shared present, past and future. Art may be a single element or multiple objects; it is unlimited in its forms. Art can transform a city infrastructure in a multitude of inventive ways: artist-designed play equipment, street furniture, planter boxes, lighting, water features, landscape treatment and bike stands, to name a few.

Integral to our goal is a desire to educate members of our community about the inspirational value of public art and to physically represent a clear reflection of Menlo Park as an active, international community that is at the crucible of technology, finance, and invention in the heart of Silicon Valley.”

Analysis

The Commission’s workplan goals for May 2018 – May 2020, which were approved by City Council August 6, 2018 state:

- Improve class and program offerings, venues, partnerships and sponsorships to increase the quality and accessibility of educational, recreational, sporting, artistic, and cultural programs in the City of Menlo Park;
- Support initiatives partnerships and projects that intersect with the City’s parks and community services resulting in well-coordinated efforts to meet the needs of residents

While many municipalities have a public art program, there are a number of ways in which they are administered. Some cities retain a public art consultant to manage the program, while others may work with an outside nonprofit such as an art council or MPPA to bring public art to their communities. Considerations would include managing a public art budget, developing a strategy for the community’s public art program, site selection and selecting the optimal pieces for those locations. In most cases there is a dedicated staff person to manage the collection registry, outline terms of an agreement – including transportation, installation, exhibition (lighting, signage, marketing,) de-installation, maintenance, insurance, grant of artist license and intellectual property rights.

In working with the Parks and Recreation Commission to identify the key terms in the agreement, staff would be able to bring a more finalized and thorough proposal to City Council for their review. The Commission could also serve in an advisory role in evaluating the pilot project.

If City Council wishes to pursue the development of a pilot public art project with MPPA, the proposal and terms of the agreement will need to address the above considerations. A pilot project will provide the opportunity to develop and evaluate the full scope of the potential of a public art program and help inform future recommendations to City Council.

Impact on City Resources

If directed by the City Council, staff from community services, city attorney, and public works will work with MPPA to develop a proposal and negotiate terms of an agreement for the pilot project. Staff anticipates there will be costs associated with the acquisition, transportation, installation, maintenance and de-installation of the artwork, which will be also require a budget authorization in the proposal to City Council.

Environmental Review

This action is not a project within the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines §§ 15378 and 15061(b)(3) as it will not result in any direct or indirect physical change in the environment.

Public Notice

Public notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with the agenda items being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

Attachments

- A. Images of Talking Heads by Oleg Lobykin
- B. Hyperlink – MPPA’s mission: menloparkpublicart.org/

Report prepared by:
Adriane Lee Bird, Assistant Community Services Director

Report reviewed by:
Derek Schweigart, Community Services Director

Talking Heads is an 18-ft high abstract sculpture, a spatial composition based on a balance between negative and positive space in conjunction with a line that can create an image or point of reference to spark imagination. Oleg Lobykin, www.lobykin.com



