

TO: Arts and Culture Commission
FROM: Tom Hellmann, Recreation & Community Services Manager
SUBJECT: **“HELLO, I’M JOHNNY CASH” THE NEXT ART EXPERIENCE ON THE JOHNNY CASH TRAIL**

BACKGROUND

The Johnny Cash Trail was finalized in 2017 as a Class I trail that connects Sacramento County trails that takes you over Folsom Lake Crossing. The 8 dedicated art experiences were master planned to their locations as part of the overall trail project with the trail on a combination of City of Folsom property, California State Prison property, and Bureau of Reclamation property. Everything to the east of the Johnny Cash Trail Bridge is Bureau of Reclamation property.

You can find the Johnny Cash Trail Art Experience map and specific art experience sites in the attached Johnny Cash Trail Art Experience masterplan (attachment 1)

The art experiences that are identified on the map and in the master plan, were determined from a national database of artists during the October 15, 2013, release for Request for Qualifications. This request garnered 32 interested artists that were reviewed by a 12-member art selection panel comprised of Art and Culture Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission, Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Bureau, project engineer, Folsom Prison Museum, Friends of Folsom Parkways, and the Parks & Recreation Department. In addition, Cindy Cash was invited to participate as one of five children of Johnny Cash providing invaluable insight into his career and personal life. An extensive amount of time and multiple meetings were conducted in reviewing submissions and ranking them based upon experience, budget estimates, suitability of concepts for the trail venue, creativity, and vision. Ultimately, the submissions were narrowed down from 32 to 20 to 8 to 4 and then the top 2 artists. The panel selected Romo Studios LLC and the Fine Art Studio of Rotblatt Amrany (dba Timeless Creations). Romo Studios LLC was selected for 7 total artwork pieces, but 6 creatively unique pieces of artwork, while Timeless Creations was selected for a single art and park proposal.

During September 23, 2014, Folsom City Council meeting the council approved Resolution No. 9435 approving the concepts for the Johnny Cash Trail Art Experience Project, Direction to Staff, and Appropriation of Funds.

On September 11, 2018, the Folsom City Council Approved Resolution No. 10181 to execute a consultant and professional services agreement with Romo Studios, LLC for the casting of Cash’s Pick No. 1 for the Johnny Cash Trail Art Experience. During that contract review, Mr. Romo prepared a presentation to bring to the Art and Culture Commission regarding the design of Pick No. 1. This was for two reasons: 1. In speaking

with John R. Cash Trust/Estate it was determined that the use of CASH resembled and replicated an album cover of Johnny Cash that did not correlate to Johnny's time in Folsom in 1968, thus making the use of the block lettering on the pick design not an option and 2. Adan Romo amended the original concept design he submitted in 2014 to align with this new direction and alter the design to be a black sculpture guitar pick.

At the September 13, 2018, Arts and Culture Commission meeting an action item was brought forward regarding Cash's Pick design. The commission heard from Romo Studios artist, Adan Romo regarding the design of Cash's Pick and the recommendation to remove lettering and name from the pick as to not denote this as a sign, but a standalone art sculpture of a guitar pick that is settled in the middle of a record deck as the landscape design plan suggests for this art experience. The commission heard from Mr. Romo, asked questions and took action to pass a recommendation to City Council on the design of Cash's Pick by a vote of 4-1 with two commissioners absent.

Following this new information and action from the Arts and Culture Commission to recommend the design change, staff worked with Mr. Romo on the project. Unfortunately, six months later we saw the world impacted by the COVID pandemic and things came to halt. Following those years of impact, we emerged with available funds from the American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) that we designated to the construction of Cash's Pick No. 1. At the April 27, 2021, Folsom City Council meeting they approved Resolution No. 10614 for increased compensation in the amount of \$20,920 to Romo Studios, LLC for the casting of Cash's Pick No. 1 for the Johnny Cash Trail Art Experience. The staff report also shared the design image of Cash's Pick No. 1 of a solid black sculpture with no lettering or naming on the face of the guitar pick. The contract was approved for execution and from then until November 21, 2024, when it was installed.

On September 9, 2025, the Folsom City Council requested an update on the Art Experience projects. City Council shared concerns about the art pick design and wanted to ask staff for options on the art pick design along with next steps for the project.

DISCUSSION

The City of Folsom and City Council adopted a Strategic Plan in 2023-2024 that provided strategic initiatives that the City Council wished to focus on over the next five years. The City Council identified five priorities with one of those being, developing funding plan for the Johnny Cash Trail (JCT) art trail. This priority coincided with action staff had already taken in the spring of 2023 when staff submitted a member request letter to Assemblymember Josh Hoover, District 7 requesting \$425,000 to be identified in the State of California Budget Act of 2023 for the design, engineering, and art fabrication of Cash's Pick No. 2. The plan was to complete both of Cash's Pick art experiences to signify the start and end of the Johnny Cash Trail. In July, Mr. Hoover contacted staff to say that the request was granted and placed in the budget for funds to be disbursed by California State Parks and the Office of Grants and Loans, to be spent by January 31, 2027. City staff contacted the Bureau of Reclamation to restart conversations regarding a letter issued to the City of Folsom in 2018 and 2019 that signified their completion of a cursory review of our project proposal to place Cash's

Pick No. 2 on federal land, and that our application was found to be “not incompatible” with Reclamation’s mission. Staff submitted payment to the Bureau of Reclamation totaling \$5,000 for this site license in 2019 and as we fast forward to a meeting between the two agencies on July 19, 2024, the Bureau of Reclamation changed their position claiming the art experience was identified as a “monument” to Johnny Cash and under 43CFR 423.28, describes that monuments are not allowed on federal land. Staff asked the Bureau of Reclamation to explain the definition of a monument and to further explain what changed from their letter issued in 2018 until now as the same Area Manager was still representing this area. We had a follow up phone call with Edward Rosa, Relator Specialist with the Bureau of Reclamation on September 22, 2025, to discuss and request the above-mentioned explanation of a monument and letter of approval. Staff received a letter from the Bureau of Reclamation on October 10, 2025, which officially denied the site license. (Attachment 2)

RECOMMENDATION

It is staff’s recommendation that we abandon Cash’s Pick No. 2 as an Art Experience site and focus our attention on the next Art Experience that would signify entry onto the Johnny Cash Trail from the east end of the trail with a public art sculpture entitled, “Hello, I am Johnny Cash”. (Attachment 3)

This Art Experience site is located on City of Folsom property and staff expect \$425,000 to cover the art fabrication, art installation, and the landscape design. Staff would look at any remaining funds for use of other construction costs. Staff would begin conversations with RRM Landscape Design and enter a contract for design and construction documents along with a contract with Romo Studios, LLC, for the fabrication of the art sculpture. Staff do not have accurate estimates for this total project cost now but would turn our attention to this project to spend the grant money secured by Assemblymember Hoover and held with California State Parks. Contracts with RRM Landscape and Romo Studios, LLC, would likely exceed the City Manager’s authority, thus an action would be taken by the City Council at a future meeting.

ACTION

Staff recommend the Arts and Culture Commission approve the action to move forward with securing California State Park grant funds and developing a professional services agreement with Romo Studios, LLC for the fabrication and installation of “Hello, I’m Johnny Cash” and to forward this request to the Folsom City Council.

Attachments

1. Johnny Cash Trail Art Experience Masterplan
2. Bureau of Reclamation Letter
3. Hello, I’m Johnny Cash Art Experience Concept

Attachment 1
Johnny Cash Trail Art Experience Masterplan

Can be found at <https://folsomcasharttrail.com/the-trail/about>

Attachment 2
Bureau of Reclamation Letter

Attachment 3
Hello, I'm Johnny Cash Art Experience Concept



ROMOSTUDIOS LLC

