



ARTS COUNCIL CITY OF MERCER ISLAND

AC 25-06
October 15, 2025
Regular Business

AGENDA BILL INFORMATION

TITLE:	AC 25-06: Standing Strong Veterans Pergola – Improvements and Operational Guidelines	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only <input type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendation
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	Provide input to Staff on potential updates to the Pergola and appropriate operational uses.	

STAFF:	Ryan Daly, Recreation Manager
EXHIBITS:	1. Exhibit 1- AB 3826 2. Exhibit 2- Pergola Pictures

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this agenda bill is to provide information about the history and uses of the Veterans Pergola in Mercerdale Park and to seek the Arts Council's input regarding community member requested enhancements and designated uses.

- In 2001 the City Council demonstrated a desire to develop a public memorial to honor U.S. veterans.
- The Arts Council stewarded the project over 3 years, soliciting community input to develop a design through a process that included veteran consultation and numerous public meetings.
- Community input was to create a “sense of place” for reflection, performance, and community gatherings. The goal for the project was to create a venue for civic and cultural events including Music in the Park, Summer Celebration, Veterans/Memorial Day celebrations, the Tree Lighting, and more.
- On December 15, 2003, the City Council approved the design for a steel pergola with domed roof, inscription “Honoring the Service of Our Veterans,” and five bronze plaques (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard).
- The project was funded through the 1% for Art in Public Places Fund, installed at Mercerdale Park Plaza, and dedicated in 2005.
- Following the installation of the Pergola, a canvas cover was added to enhance usability.
- The current use of the Pergola aligns with the community vision for the project, which includes promoting community gathering through events and is seasonally decorated with holiday lights, flower baskets, and hosts temporary community art projects such as *Island Lanterns*.
- The City’s Parks Maintenance Team is responsible for general maintenance (cleaning and graffiti/posting removal) and Recreation Division coordinated repainting of the structure in 2011.
- The Pergola does not have a maintenance plan or established guidelines for use. Recently staff received input from a community member requesting the City to update the bronze plaques honoring the Armed Forces, limit usages of the Pergola, and replace the canvas cover.

BACKGROUND

Standing Strong, or the Veterans Pergola (Pergola), originated from a 2001 City Council retreat that directed creation of a public memorial to honor the contributions of U.S. veterans.

Over the following three years, the Arts Council utilized multiple public meetings, veteran consultations, and an artist selection process to shape the project and design. Veterans and the community alike strongly emphasized that the memorial should create a “sense of place”—a site for reflection, performance, and community gatherings.

After reviewing several designs, reviewing community input, and receiving the Arts Council's recommendation (Exhibit 1), the City Council directed staff to contract with artist and general contractor Richard Frombach in 2003 to create a steel pergola with a domed roof, "hatband" inscription stating "Honoring the Service of Our Veterans," and five bronze plaques representing the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. Per City Council direction, the project was funded from the 1% for Art in Public Places Fund (1% for Art).

The Pergola was constructed in Mercerdale Park Plaza, a highly visible location, and dedicated in 2005. It has since become a venue for civic and cultural events, including Music in the Park, Summer Celebration, Veterans and Memorial Day gatherings, the Tree Lighting, and various other City-coordinated and community hosted events and ceremonies. In addition to hosting various events, the Pergola has been decorated seasonally with holiday lights, hanging baskets, and temporary art installations such as Island Lanterns. Exhibit 2 provides pictures of the Pergola, current usages, and installations.

Following the design of the Pergola, it was determined a canvas cover was desired to enhance the usage, providing shade during warm summer events. In addition to using 1% for Art funds appropriated by the City Council, the Arts Council received a grant from the Mercer Island Community Fund to support the purchase of the cover. The cover was custom designed and installed seasonally from 2005 to around 2021, undergoing significant repairs in 2012. In 2022 the cover was deemed unusable. The City replaced it with a synthetic mesh sunshade, a smaller and more cost-effective option that has been installed annually using existing attachment points on the Pergola.

Maintenance on the Pergola structure has been limited to general cleaning, which includes pressure washing by the Parks Maintenance team and a contracted repainting in 2011. This team frequently removes unauthorized postings and occasional graffiti, as necessary.

ISSUE/DISCUSSION

When the Pergola was designed and installed, maintenance and operational guidelines were not developed. Use of the Pergola is managed by Parks and Recreation staff, who have utilized the community vision and design intent for the Pergola to inform on authorized usages.

Recently staff received input from a community member who provided the following comments/requests related to the Pergola:

- Temporarily hanging items, such as flower baskets, from the Pergola is inappropriate and contradicts with the intent of the artwork, and these activities should cease.
- A bronze plaque for the Space Force, a branch of the Armed Forces established in 2019, should be added to the artwork.
- The canvas cover should be repaired and installed seasonally instead of the mesh shade.

Tonight, staff seek the Arts Councils input on the following topics and associated questions:

Armed Forces Plaques

According to the [U.S. Department of War](#) website, the United States Armed Forces include seven distinct components: Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force, Coast Guard, and National Guard. Staff estimates the cost of fabricating new plaques at approximately \$1500 - \$3000 per plaque and approximately \$3000-\$5000 for installation.

- Would the addition of plaques for the Space Force and the National Guard reflect contemporary recognition of service branches align with the stated artistic intent and community vision?

- Does the Arts Council desire staff to obtain quotes for fabrication and installation of plaques for the Space Force and/or National Guard to inform potential next steps to be added in to the 6-Year Workplan for Art in Public Places?

Seasonal Uses & Temporary Displays

The Pergola was designed to provide “sense of place”—a site for reflection, performance, and community gatherings and has historically been utilized for these purposes as well as City-coordinated seasonal installations, including hanging flower baskets and temporary art installations such as *Island Lanterns*.

- Do these seasonal and temporary uses align with the stated artistic intent and community vision?
- What types of uses should be permitted?
- Does the Arts Council desire that staff develop and document guidelines for appropriate use of the Pergola for Arts Council endorsement?

Canvas Cover

The canvas cover has been installed seasonally to shade the Pergola and enhance community use of the space. Since dedicating the Pergola in 2005, the tree canopy around the artwork has matured, eliminating much of the need for the canvas cover. Staff have received mixed feedback about the canvas cover from the community over the years; some residents feel it detracts from the aesthetic of the artwork, while others have shared a desire to maintain it. The current cover is beyond repair and needs to be replaced, the estimated cost for replacement is between \$8,000 and \$10,000. Staff does not recommend replacing the cover.

- Is the canvas cover integral to the stated artistic intent and community vision?
- If yes, should the City continue to invest in this feature?

NEXT STEPS

The Arts Council is scheduled to update the rolling 6-Year Workplan for Art in Public Places in April 2026.

Following tonight’s discussion, should the Arts Council wish to further consider including improvements to the Pergola in the 6-Year Workplan, staff will return in April with updated cost estimates. Updates to the first two years of the 6-Year Workplan will serve as recommendations to the City Council for 1% for the Arts projects to be included in the 2027–2028 Biennial Budget.

If desired, staff anticipate developing and recommending appropriate use guidelines for the Pergola in Q2 of 2026.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Provide input to staff on potential updates to the Pergola and appropriate operational uses.