



# ARTS COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

**Item (4)  
July 17, 2024  
Regular Business**

## AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION

<b>TITLE:</b>	Next Steps for <i>Downtown Streetscapes</i> : Street Name Inlays	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only
<b>RECOMMENDED ACTION:</b>	Recommend next steps to staff for the Street Name Inlays series.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution

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<b>COUNCIL LIAISON:</b>	Ted Weinberg
<b>EXHIBITS:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. SP0118 Project Map</li> <li>2. Photos of Street Name Inlays in Project Area</li> <li>3. Guidelines for Deaccession of Works of Art</li> </ol>

## SUMMARY

The purpose of this staff report is to seek direction from the Arts Council on next steps for *Downtown Streetscapes*: Street Name Inlays, a series of bronze works installed at street corners throughout Mercer Island Town Center. Curb ramps at 11 street corners will be upgraded to comply with the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in summer 2024, and inlays, which do not comply with ADA regulations, must be removed from the project area.

### ABOUT STREET NAME INLAYS

*Downtown Streetscapes* encompasses ten unique art elements designed by artist Ellen Sollod and installed on 77<sup>th</sup> and 78<sup>th</sup> Avenues SE during major Town Center street reconstruction in 1994. One of the art elements is Street Name Inlays (Exhibit 1).

The downtown streets of Mercer Island were named after early settlers of the Island. In the 1930s, King County renamed the streets to conform to a numbered grid. The Street Name Inlays series features the original names of seven downtown streets:

- Helen: 77<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE
- Gilpin: 78<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE
- Cable: SE 27<sup>th</sup> Street
- Tallman: SE 28<sup>th</sup> Street
- Summit: SE 29<sup>th</sup> Street
- Treen: SE 30<sup>th</sup> Street
- Proctor: SE 32<sup>nd</sup> Street

Two bronze names were inlaid at the base of the curb ramps on 21 street corners to denote the original intersections. Each letter is a bronze 655 plate that is 4.5” tall and .375” thick, and type is set on a 30-foot radius. To install each intersection marker, the last letters were welded to a silicon bronze framework, then the entire street name was secured to a block-out and filled with set grout.

## **ADA TRANSITION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

In May 2022, Mercer Island City Council adopted the [ADA Transition Plan](#), which identifies and guides the implementation of necessary accessibility improvements across the Island. ADA upgrades approved in the 2023-2024 Biennial Budget focus on Town Center pedestrian facilities (SP0118) and include replacing curb ramps, adjacent curbs/gutters, and sidewalks at 11 corners in 4 intersections this summer (Exhibit 1).

New detectable warning strips known as truncated domes will be installed in the curb ramps to comply with the ADA. Truncated domes are yellow tactile buttons that can be seen, felt, and heard to alert sight-impaired people when they approach a sidewalk edge that enters a roadway/crosswalk. Street Name Inlays installed within the project vicinity (Exhibit 2) will be removed to accommodate the new truncated domes and to comply with the ADA.

## **MITIGATING IMPACTS TO STREET NAME INLAYS**

Eventually all Town Center curb ramps will be upgraded for ADA compliance, so City staff started working together in June 2023 to determine the best path forward for the entire Street Name Inlays series. It was determined that reinstalling the existing inlays at the same site was not feasible, so in August 2023, staff met with the artist to determine if all or some of the impacted Street Name Inlays could be re-sited or reused.

Sollod noted that the bronzes are very place-specific; reinstalling them outside of their original context diminishes the artwork's intent and impact, and she did not recommend re-siting the inlays to a new location. She did suggest two options for adapting or reusing the removed pieces:

1. Develop a new project by placing the existing pieces in a new context that builds on and responds to the history they represent.
2. Donate the pieces to a fine arts school or center (e.g. Pratt Fine Arts Center) that can melt them down and use them for new projects.

Both ideas require salvaging the existing bronze letters, so the ADA design consultant provided high-level information for how to complete this work.

One method is to sawcut the entire concrete block of each inlay and store the blocks until a new project can be identified. This method would likely be less time intensive, but the concrete slabs would be heavy (<200 lbs) and still need to be carefully cut to save the planar portion. Additionally, the slabs would still be fragile enough to break if mishandled.

Another method is to carefully remove individual bronze letters. This option requires chipping each letter out of the concrete, then cleaning, loading, and transporting the letters to storage. Additional equipment and labor time would be required to complete this work, which the ADA design consultant estimated will cost at least \$2,500 per intersection. Work would also be limited to one corner at a time to maintain pedestrian circulation, which would likely increase time and costs.

Currently, the City stores two works of art at Art Work Fine Services in Seattle, WA. Storage costs are calculated based on the volume of work stored, and volume is calculated using bin size or cubic footage. The City pays approximately \$3,000/year for public art storage now; staff have not calculated the cost to store the bronze letters but anticipate an increase by adding the bronze pieces.

The costs associated with salvaging the Street Name Inlays were not included in the approved 2023-2024 budget for SP0118, so removal and storage would need to be funded by the 1% for Art in Public Places Fund or another yet-to-be-identified source.

### **POTENTIAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

Given the artist's input and the cost/challenges associated with removing the bronze pieces, staff do not recommend salvaging the Street Name Inlays impacted by SP0118. Staff seek direction for the remaining inlays in the series. The following could be considered by the Arts Council:

**1. Recommend that the Street Name Inlays series be deaccessioned.**

Deaccessioning is the process of removing an artwork from the public art collection. City guidelines (Exhibit 3) provide eight criteria for considering deaccession if a work cannot be re-sited. The Street Name Inlays series meets criteria 4 and 5, so the Arts Council may recommend that the series be deaccessioned. The remaining Street Name Inlays would be removed and disposed of during future capital project construction.

**2. Recommend further exploration for salvaging pieces during future capital projects.**

Street Name Inlays installed at eight street corners will be removed and disposed of during construction of SP0118. The Arts Council may recommend additional exploration of whether to salvage the remaining 15 inlays during future ADA upgrade or other capital projects. If it is determined that some or all pieces should be salvaged, funding for the removal would need to be identified and a new use for the pieces would need to be developed. Upon removal, the current Street Name Inlays series would be deaccessioned.

**3. Recommend that a new project highlighting historic street names be developed.**

The Street Name Inlays, while made of durable material that has lasted for 30 years, do not meet the accessibility needs of current and future Mercer Island residents. However, the Arts Council may determine that the artwork's original intent of connecting residents to site-specific Island history still has merit. If so, the Arts Council may recommend that a new public art project be developed as part of a future work plan. The Street Name Inlays series would then be deaccessioned, and the remaining inlays would be removed and disposed of during future capital projects.

The Arts Council may also recommend a different approach if desired.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Once a recommendation is provided, staff will move forward with the appropriate next steps in the deaccession or project development process. Updates will be provided at future Arts Council meetings, and staff will seek additional input if/when necessary.

## **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

Recommend next steps to staff for the Street Name Inlays series.