

Background

The City of Mercer Island (“City”) needs tailored plans to help it emerge from a global pandemic that occurred while the municipality was already reducing programs and services. The reset plan gives the City an opportunity to apply a “zero-based” approach¹ to its programming and budget for recreation, the Mercer Island Community & Event Center (“MICEC”), and arts. The reset will allow the City to align the organizational and programmatic design to its strategic priorities and available resources.

As the emergency continues to evolve, the reset plans need to include ample flexibility. The plans also need to be reviewed periodically and adjusted as conditions and guidance change. The response to this emergency is not sequential. From time to time, the City, like all entities, may need to repeat or take backward steps. Iterative attempts may be required to find the right solution. The City will continue to move on this initial, interim path toward its future state of sustainable services, all while trying to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic.

City staff and the reset planning consultant are working with the Mercer Island Arts Council (“Arts Council”) to develop the arts element of the reset plan. Over four working sessions, the Arts Council identified areas where it would like to focus efforts through the end of 2021, both to provide arts-based programs to the community in the near-term and to plan for the long-term reset of the City Arts Work Plan and resource needs. This document outlines the program offerings and long-term planning needs the City plans to mount in the second half of 2021 as well as estimated and/or approved operating budget needs to accomplish this work.

Notably, this document outlines the potential staffing resources required to assist in executing the outlined programs and projects but does not specify from where those resources will come. Prior to the pandemic, the Arts Council was supported by a full-time Arts & Culture Coordinator, but that position was eliminated due to budget constraints caused by the pandemic. Currently, the City’s Economic Development Coordinator temporarily supports the Arts Council and will continue to do so through 2021. However, a more sustainable staff resource must be identified to support the Arts Council and execute the City Arts Work Plan in the long-term. The reset planning team continues to work to quantify the staff resource need(s), with the goal of securing sustainable staff support by the end of 2022.

Finally, the 2021 Arts Reset Plan is intended to be a flexible, working document. As projects are completed and/or conditions of the pandemic change, staff will update this document to ensure it accurately reflects the current course of action.

¹ In a “zero-based” budgeting approach, income equals expenses, meaning program costs are recovered by program revenue.

2021 Program / Project Offerings

As the reset team and the Arts Council continue to plan for the long-term reset of City arts programs and services, the board desired to provide limited offerings of two well-known and well-supported City arts programs: Mostly Music in the Park and the Mercer Island Gallery. Additionally, the board desired to engage residents in a community arts project suitable for all ages.

MOSTLY MUSIC IN THE PARK (LATE SUMMER 2021) – COMPLETED

Mostly Music in the Park (“MMIP”) was the City’s longest-running arts program prior to the pandemic, attracting 300-400 participants each week to enjoy music in Town Center’s Mercerdale Park. As an outdoor event, MMIP provides the opportunity to reconnect community members with the arts while adhering to State restrictions on activities during the pandemic.

In 2021, the Recreation team received resources to produce a limited series of no more than three (3) concerts in August and September. The Arts Council formed a committee to develop the series, and Recreation staff executed the logistics, including contracting with bands, deploying marketing, running day-of concert operations, and more. The series was scheduled to take place on Thursdays, August 19-September 2. More than 300 residents attended the August 19 concert before the City canceled the remaining concerts due to heightened COVID-19 concerns.

Approved Budget Proposal

Performer Fees	\$3,600.00
Sound Engineering	\$3,000.00
Marketing & Promotion	\$4,000.00
COVID-19 Protocols	\$2,000.00
Contract Event Coordinator	\$2,400.00
Total Operating Budget	\$15,000.00

Staff Assistance Required

- Event planning and contracting
- Marketing and promotion
- Concert operations

Arts Reset Committee Members

- Erik Gordon
- Erin Vivion

MERCER ISLAND GALLERY

Prior to the pandemic, the City mounted seven exhibits at the Mercer Island Gallery (indoor gallery) and generated \$10k-\$12k in art sales annually. In early 2021, the City prioritized reopening the gallery as it aligned with the phased reopening of the Mercer Island Community and Event Center (MICEC). The City partnered with the Mercer Island Visual Arts League (MIVAL) to host the annual MIVAL Holiday Show from October to December 2021. Plans to present that exhibit are still moving forward. However, as the timeline for resuming MICEC programs and services continues to shift due to the ongoing pandemic, staff recommend refocusing on resuming indoor gallery programs in 2022. Reopening the gallery will not only provide a bright and creative atmosphere to welcome visitors back to MICEC but also will restore a valuable space for local artists to exhibit their artwork.

Managing the indoor gallery previously took considerable staff and volunteer time. The City will continue to explore options for partnering to curate and install exhibits, streamlining the promotion and sales process, and supporting gallery needs and operations with limited staff capacity.

Approved Budget Proposal

Contract Curator	\$3,000.00
Marketing & Promotion	\$1,500.00
Operating Supplies	\$500.00
Total Operating Budget	\$5,000.00

Staff Assistance Required

- Install and deinstall operations
- Marketing and promotion
- Gallery sales

Arts Reset Committee Members

- Amy Barnes
- Erik Gordon
- Carol Whitaker

2021 ARTS RESET PLAN – LAST UPDATED 09.08.21

COMMUNITY ARTS PROJECT: *THE PRAIRIE OF POSSIBILITIES* INTERACTIVE ARTS EXPERIENCE

The Prairie of Possibilities is a temporary, interactive arts experience designed by The Moonlight Collective, a Washington-based maker studio. The project will illuminate Mercedale Park in fall/winter 2021, bringing the community together after more than a year of being separated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

After more than a year of social distancing and separating due to the COVID-19 pandemic, *The Prairie of Possibilities* offers a dreamscape for Mercer Island residents to safely explore and experience together. Visitors will be invited to walk through a “field” of 1,512 glowing fiber-optic grass stalks that create a whimsical, ever-changing landscape of light and sound. Inspired by the natural cycle of four seasons, the installation features four 15-minute, distinct lighting patterns and accompanying music. The grasses attach to bases that will be arranged in a circle approximately 130’ in diameter, with a 40’ central clearing and 10’ aisle providing through access (Figure 1). Each base will be clustered in groups of 24, with two cables for power and ethernet connecting back to a central control station, which will require 20 amps at 120V per light base or 1,400 watts total to power lights, speakers, and laptop.

Operating Budget

The Moonlight Collective Fee	\$7,500.00
Marketing & Promotion /	\$3,080.00
Operating Expenses	
Total Operating Budget	\$10,580.00

Staff Assistance Required

- Project coordination and execution
- Parks Maintenance support
- Marketing and promotion

Arts Reset Committee Members

- Suzanne Skone
- Erin Vivion
- Carol Whitaker

Long-Term Reset: Programs, Policies, Public Art

Staff and the Arts Council will continue to develop a reset strategy for the long-term horizon (2022-2024) with the goal of approving a 2022-2024 Arts Reset Plan in Q4 of 2021. This flexible plan should include:

- 2022 City Arts Work Plan, which clearly outlines priorities and objectives for the year
- Planning roadmap for developing 2023-2024 City Arts Work Plan includes the priorities and objectives Outline of programs/projects the Arts Council proposes to offer in 2022 and respective operating budget request
- Prioritized list of policies to update and/or develop to guide future City arts work
- Prioritized list of public art needs (e.g. maintenance and collection safety updates, 1% for Art Fund 6-year spending plan, signage/interpretation plan, etc.)
- Staff resources required to execute the 2022-2024 Arts Reset Plan

A working group of staff and Arts Council members continues to meet to draft the plan, which will be presented to the full Arts Council for discussion at the October Arts Council meeting.

Staff Assistance Required

- Arts Council meeting preparation and facilitation
- Policy development
- Program evaluation and budget preparation
- Staff transition planning

Arts Council Reset Committee Members

- Anumeha
- Erik Gordon
- Suzanne Skone