



ARTS COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

Item 2
July 14, 2021
Regular Business

AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION

TITLE:	Arts Immediate Action Plan: Temporary Art Installation – <i>Prairie of Possibilities</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Receive the presentation by staff and artist group; and2. Provide direction to staff on how to move forward with the temporary art installation request.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution
STAFF:	Sarah Bluvas, Economic Development Coordinator	
COUNCIL LIAISON:	Salim Nice	
EXHIBITS:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Project Proposal: <i>Prairie of Possibilities</i>	

SUMMARY

This agenda item is to review a request for a temporary art installation proposed for Mercerdale Park by the Moonlight Collective, a design studio working at the intersection of art and technology. Tonight, James Gwertzman, Mercer Island resident and project lead, will present a summary of *Prairie of Possibilities* and answer board member questions. Then staff will lead a discussion of potential for adding this project to the 2021 Arts Immediate Action Plan and seek direction on next steps.

BACKGROUND ON PRAIRIE OF POSSIBILITIES

The Moonlight Collective proposes bringing a light art installation titled *The Prairie of Possibilities* to Mercerdale Park in early October 2021. The project consists of 1,512 glowing, fiber-optic grasses that would be controlled by software and create an evolving lights landscape set to ambient music. With this project, the design studio aims to provide Mercer Island residents with an opportunity to experience a magical, dreamlike space together after more than a year of separation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The full project proposal is included in Exhibit 1. Gertzman will walk through the proposal tonight and take questions from the Arts Council.

Below is a timeline of City communications and meetings related to this request.

- April 26, 2021: James Gwertzman contacted commissioners from the Arts Council and the Parks & Recreation Commission to coordinate use of a Mercer Island park to test the light art installation and offer viewings to the public during the testing.
- June 7, 2021: Arts Council Chair Erin Vivion forwarded the request to City staff, and staff reached out to Gertzman to schedule a meeting to learn more about the request and logistics to evaluate whether the project was feasible.
- June 13, 2021: Chair Vivion, Arts Councilmember Suzanne Skone, and City Council Liaison Salim Nice viewed a small-scale demonstration of the lights.

- June 14, 2021: Chair Vivion and Arts Councilmember Skone, both members of the Community Art Project Reset Committee, shared the installation idea with Carol Whitaker as an potential opportunity to adapt or replace the community project idea already in discussion.
- June 18, 2021: Sarah Bluvas, Economic Development Coordinator, met virtually with Gertzman and Casey Marvin from the Moonlight Collective to gather more information about logistics, such as power requirements, to evaluate the feasibility of the project.
- June 18-July 2, 2021: Staff and Chair Vivion had subsequent conversations discussing the feasibility of and potential public benefits associated with the project request and agreed to bring the project to the full Arts Council at the July Regular Meeting for additional direction.

ARTS COUNCIL DISCUSSION TOPICS

After the presentation and question/answer session with Gwertzman, staff will discuss project feasibility and seek direction for whether to move forward. In preparation for that discussion, staff request the Arts Council to consider the following.

2021 Arts Immediate Action Plan

On April 14, the Arts Council endorsed the 2021 Arts Immediate Action Plan, which included a limited workplan of three arts programs in 2021:

- Host a limited Mostly Music in the Park concert series in August and September
- Reopen the Mercer Island Gallery (as it aligns with the reopening of the Mercer Island Community & Event Center)
- Coordinate a Community Arts Project that reflects on and responds to Mercer Island's COVID-19 experience

To support this workplan, the City Council appropriated \$20,000 for Mostly Music in the Park and reopening the Mercer Island Gallery on April 20 ([AB 5848](#)) and accepted the 4Culture Arts Sustained Support grant of \$10,580 as part of the first quarter budget adjustment on May 18 ([AB 5874](#)). Finally, staff resources have been assigned to complete this workplan in collaboration with the Arts Council.

If the Arts Council wishes to deviate from the approved workplan and resource allocation, staff need input on which workplan item or items could be postponed or replaced to dedicate the resources necessary to approve and implement this project request.

Process for Temporary Art Installations

While the City has some history approving and/or presenting temporary art installations (e.g. *Topiary Deer* installed in 2012 and *Contrast Distance* installed in 2020), there is currently no documented process for accepting, proposing, or evaluating these project requests. Staff recommend prioritizing and completing that process development before approving any temporary public art project proposals. However, staff also understand that there is board interest in being flexible and able to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. If the Arts Council decides to pursue this project, staff request that it be used to inform development of a temporary art installation review process and that the process be prioritized for development in Q1 of 2022.

Incorporating the Project into Illuminate MI

The City is currently discussing the possibility of again coordinating the Illuminate MI lighting installation and an associated event in Mercer Island Town Center this year. The 2020 Illuminate MI lighting installation included two public art components:

- *Contrast Distance*, a temporary light art installation created by George Lee for the Greta Hackett Outdoor Sculpture Gallery
- *Island Lanterns*, a community arts project installed in Mercerdale Park

If the Arts Council is interested in supporting this project proposal, staff recommend exploring whether it could also be integrated into the 2021 Illuminate MI installation and event.

Funding Mechanism

The Moonlight Collective's project proposal includes a funding request to support creation and installation of *Prairie of Possibilities*. As outlined previously in this staff report, the City Council has allocated limited financial resources to support City arts work in 2021. To financially support this project proposal, the Arts Council will need to recommend reallocating 2021 funds or seek approval for other funding sources. Staff will discuss options for funding during the discussion.

NEXT STEPS

Tonight, staff seek direction from the Arts Council on whether to pursue this project proposal. Staff would then work with the Moonlight Collective to identify a path forward that works within the City's constraints and meets the needs of the artist group.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Receive the presentation by the Moonlight Collective; and
2. Provide direction to staff on how move forward with the temporary art installation request.