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## Museums & Cultural Affairs

The City of El Paso Public Arts Committee (PAC)  
Tuesday, September 11, 2012, 3:30 PM  
City Hall 2nd Floor Conference Room

### MINUTES

- 1. Call to Order:** Meeting was called to order at 3:34 pm
- 2. Roll Call: Members Present:** Ken Gorski, Floyd Johnson, Martina Lorey, Marina Monsisvais (Chair), Ray Parish, Jane Thomas, Elizabeth Thurmond-Bengtson  
**Members Absent:** Rida Asfahani, Melissa Barba-Espinosa  
**Others Present:** Misty Castaneda, Pat Dalbin, Sean McGlynn
- 3. Public Comment:** Lisa Turner, to speak on Item 5
- 4. Approval of Minutes.** Chair asked for approval of the Minutes for the last meeting on August 21, 2012. Ken Gorski motioned to approve the minutes as presented. Floyd Johnson seconded; all members voted in favor, none opposed, and motion passed unanimously.
- 5. Discussion and Action to Amend Tom Drugan and Laura Haddad Contract for the Alameda RTS Project to the Dyer RTS Project.** Chair began by mentioning that at today's council meeting, rather than canceling the artists' contract altogether, which could be detrimental to our reputation as a city, it was suggested that the artists' contract be reallocated over to the Dyer corridor and Reps. Byrd and Robinson are supportive of that. Sean McGlynn added that there was a lengthy conversation between Pat Dalbin and the artists yesterday and without the move by Rep. Acosta to delay this item a week, he suspected the artists might have resigned the commission overnight. They feel this is damaging to their reputation and they are having a hard time figuring out how to work with the City when they understood a process that was in place around that working. Sean mentioned that Pat has spoken with them and it is believed they would be amenable to this; he has had meetings with both Rep. Robinson and Rep. Byrd about this possibility of moving them into a place of being able to have a fresh start in this conversation. Both representatives were amenable to that process. Stated he is not a stickler for a lot of the points being made, but that one of the things that would be good on projects that span multiple engagements with multiple districts would be to have each representative in each district appoint a couple of people from their communities to the artist selection panel moving forward. This is one way to assure that there is inclusion and notification on a large distance-covering project.

Sean continued to explain there was a lot of rhetoric at today's Council meeting and some insinuation that the artists were not involved in certain processes, when they were actually involved in a lot of conversations about the corridor, the RTS, etc. This proposal will allow the PAC and the City to continue a relationship with this artist team, but there is uncertainty as to whether the artists want to continue in this relationship because they have become fearful that this will be a continuing challenge. One of the things asked of the artists by the PAC in the last meeting was for them to continue to take community input, but it doesn't seem to be moving any dials at this particular point. The concern is how we can manage this relationship together with the artists, preserve the intent for the City to work with this team and include them in a zone that is going to be welcoming to them while amending our process for these types of selection processes moving forward. The methodology through which the PAC would vote on this would be direct selection. Sean further explained that as in the guidelines per the Dyer project, the PAC would have the power to direct select an artist or artist team. The action item being considered is to direct select the artist team for Dyer RTS, then go back and have a negotiation with them and move that process forward. For Alameda, the selection process would be one in which there are multiple appointments from the district representatives in order to get a full community conversation where

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everyone understands the aesthetics. This would be led by involvement of individuals from Planning, Engineering and the architects of record on the project.

Sean opened the floor for questions and general discussion followed. Jane Thomas replied that it all sounded reasonable to her. Ken Gorski inquired as to whether a selection team for Dyer RTS was in place. Pat Dalbin replied that nothing had been done yet, but the call has been developed. Ken continued to ask if the architect has been selected and Pat replied that it is out on the streets. Ken asked Sean if he was correct in understanding that the selection process traditionally utilized would be bypassed and Sean replied that direct select would be used as listed in the guidelines on page 14, item 3. The process has been used before and an artist group can be chosen by direct select in order to preserve working relationships that the committee wants to engage with for a project. Elizabeth Thurmond-Bengtson inquired if the Dyer project is smaller than the Alameda project, and Pat replied they are about the same size and it is a \$300,000 project. Sean added that the contract would need to be amended and the work done to date would need to be dealt with. Marina Monsisvais asked if the artist team would keep their Allied Artist and Pat replied that an Allied Artist would be selected for the Dyer project. Sean added that there was a motion by one of the representatives to consider moving the Allied Artist to that location, but the artist team will be consulted with to make sure that relationship is working. We are not adverse to them re-selecting the local artist who is working on the project and did a lot of ground work and some design work to move that project forward.

Sean continued by saying this is an opportunity for us to move forward in a conversation where we would go to each of the representatives and request a couple people to sit on a selection panel and help make a decision about an aesthetic that is correct for this corridor. The challenge becomes the transference of the moment of the aesthetic choice to the actualization. Martina Lorey stated she did not ever want to be a part of an organization that starts to dictate what artwork should look like, or to create infrastructure that dictates what the artwork will look like. She further explained the artists' vision should be acknowledged and preserved because that is what will make El Paso progressive, interesting, vibrant and alive. Elizabeth Thurmond-Bengtson mentioned that her problem with the situation is that this was brought up and there was an opportunity for public comment, and no one came when it was presented to the PAC. She further stated not one representative came and not one person who lives in that community came either. She continued to say that she really has a problem with this being dictated by the representatives because they should have come to the meeting if they were that interested in what is going on in their district. Floyd Johnson asked what was happening on Alameda, and Sean replied that Alameda is now facing some additional challenges as there are now some right-of-way issues and that project has slowed down. Jane Thomas asked if Dyer was ready to go, and Sean replied that Dyer is in the solicitation phase for the architect.

With that, Sean opened the floor for public comment and Lisa Turner began by addressing the PAC and stating that what happened at Council earlier in the day was reprehensible. She stated this is freedom of expression and representatives dictating what gets put up, not what the artist wants to do. She continued by mentioning the City is now open to liability if the artist decides to quit. The artist must be respected and what happened today is reprehensible. Ms. Turner stated that Rep. Acosta decided she did not like what the artist was doing and it has become a north of I-10, south of I-10 issue. It's got nothing to do with art. The question to deal with is whether or not politicians will be allowed to dictate what the artist is going to do. Art by its very nature is supposed to inspire, cause people to think and cause discussion – which is what this art has done. It doesn't make any difference whether everyone likes it or not. Ms. Turner continued by saying it is her right to whether she likes it or not, but she cannot tell the artist what to do, that is his work and she has no right to tell him how to do or interpret his work. A decision has to be made: do you stand up for the artist that you hired or are you going to let council members decide what they consider to be art and what is allowed to be put up? She stated that the reputation of the PAC is damaged simply because of what showed up on the agenda. The contract, the rules and the process that was laid down was followed, so what is the problem? The problem is there is a city representative who doesn't like the art. Stand up for the process and the freedom of expression that the artist has.

Sean then read a letter from Representative Emma Acosta into the record (attached as part of these minutes). Marina Monsisvais stated that what she had heard at the community meeting held by Rep. Acosta on the Alameda project wasn't that the public disliked it; it was that they wanted their voices heard. Martina Lorey stated it was a very opinionated letter. General discussion followed and Ken Gorski made a motion to direct select Tom Drugan and Laura Haddad and transfer, should they so decide, to the Dyer RTS; additionally, the subsequent reselection process for Alameda will include each City Representative designating up to 2 individuals to express the feelings of the community as they see it in

the selection process for the artist. Ray Parish seconded; all members voted in favor, none opposed, and motion passed unanimously.

**6. Adjournment.** Chair requested a motion to adjourn. Jane Thomas moved to adjourn; Martina Lorey seconded; all members voted in favor, none opposed, and motion passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 4:39 pm. Next meeting scheduled for October 9, 2012.

Approved for content by:  
Patricia Dalbin, Public Art Program Coordinator

Respectfully submitted by:  
Misty Castaneda, Administrative Assistant

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## **My concerns with the Alameda Art Project:**

I have received many comments and concerns about the Alameda Art Project. Representative Holguin and I coordinated a community meeting along the corridor on August 20<sup>th</sup> at a local business establishment; the meeting was well attended and included no less than 8 Neighborhood Association Presidents and local community artists as well as many community residents that live along the Alameda corridor, Representative Ortega also attended.

I have been criticized by a member of the Museum and Cultural Affairs Board (MCAD), for involving the community and holding a meeting for the Alameda residents. While I admire and have a deep respect for all the board members, I believe that public art is commissioned by the public and thus the public should have the opportunity to decide the type of art that its community should have, see, and appreciate on a daily basis, and thus respectfully disagree with those comments.

Perhaps the process of de-politicizing art projects would happen if the public were allowed to voice their concerns and their preferences. In this instance, the public that lives along the 18 mile corridor was not included in the involvement process. It would be disingenuous of me not to consider the concerns of the residents that live along the corridor. Additionally, the 2% for the Arts Program was actually championed by a politician in the late 1990's. We as a council also voted to continue the 2% for the arts when an item was placed on the agenda a few weeks ago to decrease the amount to 1% or do away with it all together. There seems to be a believe that residents of this community should not voice their concerns or be involved in the type of public art that will be displayed, I would like to remind everyone that Public Art is art that is commissioned by the public. It is the public that pays for the capital project and thus pays for the public art that will be situated in this community.

The type of art that mimics the images off of lotería cards is insulting and insensitive to the residents of that area. Most of the art pieces truly had no thought process other than to use car parts to symbolize the lotería icons. The Public Art guidelines state that the placement of Artwork includes a "relationship to architectural and natural features, landscape design, environmental impact and concerns, and future plans for the area." Apparently the "future plans for the area" were not disclosed to the Public Art Committee (PAC) nor were they disclosed to the Artist Selection Panel (ASP). The guidelines also state that the "PAC is to Recommend written regulations to include, but not be limited to, criteria for selection of artists and works of art." The Pac's written criteria did not include the Future plans for Alameda or the historical significance of the area perhaps because they (PAC) did not have this information.

It is also apparent that the MCAD, board was not aware of the future plans for the Alameda corridor when they approved the concepts, the pole type art, and the locations for these. Let me also state that the art to be placed along the corridor is not an art exhibit that will go away in a few months but is permanent art that will be in place for the next 20 to 30 years.

The communities all along the Alameda corridor have made great strides in changing not only the appearance of the Alameda corridor but also have made great efforts in economically revitalizing a once thriving corridor. During the months of September of 2009, approximately 13 meetings were held along the corridor in an effort to implement a zoning overlay that would diminish the amount of used car lots along the corridor as well as diminish the amount of places that sell used car parts. The city has dedicated two full time code compliance officers to enforce environment and city ordinances along this corridor. We're not trying to end established used car businesses that are in the area but not encourage others that set up a business for a few months and then have a subsequent same type of car lot business spring up a few months later.

State Rep. Gonzales and State Senator Rodriguez both brought about legislative bills to designate Alameda, a State Highway as a Historical Highway. The city's Plan El Paso document includes the Alameda corridor and the revitalization mechanisms to bring about both an aesthetically pleasing corridor and an economical viable corridor. Yet, none of these factors were considered in any discussion by the PAC, ASP, or the MCAD. It is

apparent that these issues were not provided to them by anyone both within the city and outside the city organization.

The Goals as stated in the guidelines include "To enhance the quality of life of residents through the thoughtful infusion of artists at a neighborhood level and in the design of publicly financed infrastructure, to promote economic revitalization by adding value..., to define, enhance, and improve authentic images of El Paso..." It is my belief that none of these factors were considered in any discussion by any of the committees, the board, or the MCAD staff.

The artist, Mr. Duggan, is not to be blamed for his art concepts; he simply did not have a clear indication of the history of the corridor or the future plans for the area. While he may have done some research in the area, he by no means is to be considered a historian. Thus when he was provided with a 1943 map, he had no reason to believe that this map was totally incorrect and did not depict the era of 1943. The 1943 map includes the University of Texas at El Paso, which did not exist as such, it included the Chamizal area, which again did not occur until the late 1960's, and it included Interstate 10 which did not happen until the 1970's. The artist did not consider the history of the Missions along the corridor which includes the oldest mission in Texas recorded and is in the Texas historical registry. The artist did not consider the future plans for the area as I assume, he was not informed of these plans.

While everyone in the community and outside the community may believe that residents along the 18 miles of the Alameda corridor relate with the lotería icons, I guarantee you that we do not. It's almost like saying everyone that has played bingo relates to the letters and numbers of the bingo game.

The lotería icons and the words used to represent the icons were thoughtless and insensitive to the residents along the corridor and go against the public art guidelines that indicate "enhance the quality of life of residents through the thoughtful infusion of artists at a neighborhood level" I've had many of them voice their concerns and indicate that these icons are not representative of the once thriving Alameda corridor.

It is for these reasons that I believed the artist contract should be terminated or that the artist be moved to another project. I would ask that the process for the Alameda corridor be restarted and that the public be allowed to participate.

The placement of art stretches along almost 18 miles of Alameda and is not one piece of art but 30 pieces of art that includes the pole art and the screen art. It is also for this reason that I believe the Public Art guidelines must be amended to include projects that cover many miles of capital improvements and that designate more than one work of art. That the historical significance of the area as well as the future plans for the corridor be provided to the PAC, the ASP, and the MCAD board during all processes of artist selection and approval of art concepts.

I am postponing this item for one week as the MCAD director, Mr. Sean McGlean has indicated that there are other possible solutions for the Artist and the Alameda Art Project and that he will bring these solutions and/or recommendations forward.

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