Minutes
The Philadelphia Art Commission
Wednesday, May 6, 2020 - 9:30 a.m.
Remote – WebEx Meeting – Hosted by DPZ

Members present: Alan Greenberger, Jose Alminana, Carmen Febo-San Miguel, Steven Hartner, Joe Laragione, Raed Nasser, Natalie Nixon, Robert Roesch, Mario Zacharajas

Meeting of the Philadelphia Art Commission

Chairperson Greenberger called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. introducing everyone to the first remote Philadelphia Art Commission meeting.

Beige Berryman – staff member of the Art Commission – introduced the WebEx platform and remote Art Commission process, noting that the meeting is being recorded, and by participating in this meeting you are giving consent to be recorded. Beige noted the meeting video will be posted on the AC website and the meeting agenda and material items will also be posted on the AC website at [https://www.phila.gov/departments/philadelphia-art-commission/](https://www.phila.gov/departments/philadelphia-art-commission/).

Finally, Beige had a few instructions for the public. Public participants may comment on agenda items during the meeting. Comments should be asked through the “Q&A” function, found on the right-hand side of the screen, public should type question in the box and click “send all.” Important so everyone can see the comment. Staff will then read the comments out loud during the public comment period. If you have submitted comments through email, Art Commission staff will read these out loud during the comment period.

Chairperson Greenberger noted that due to COVID-19 related shutdowns within the City of Philadelphia, the March 4, 2020 meeting minutes as well as the March 18, 2020 reporting of the Sign Committee are postponed.

Chairperson Greenberger acknowledged that this is William Burke’s last Art Commission meeting. Bill has been the director of the commission for 28 years! Congratulations on all your accomplishments over your 43 years of service to the City of Philadelphia.

Administrative Approval

1. 55-20

Association of Public Art Sculpture Conservation
Review Type: Public art on public property
Project Details: Various locations, 34 outdoor sculptures
Submitted by: Association of Public Art
Chairperson Greenberger recused himself from this vote. Upon motion by Mr. Zacharajasz, seconded by, Mr. Alminana the members of the Commission voted to endorse the administrative approval.

Presentations

1. 88-19

Frankford Avenue Connector Project – second hearing
Phase I of Underpass Gallery, west side of Frankford Avenue between Wildey and Richmond Streets
Review Type: Public artwork in the street right-of-way
Project Details: Sign-Wall and Screen-Wall elements
Submitted by: Delaware River Waterfront Corporation (DRWC)

Christopher Marcinkoski – Principal, PORT Urbanism
Lizzy Woods – DRWC
Christopher Dougherty, DRWC

Mr. Marcinkoski introduced the presentation and the other members of the team. This is the second review of the project and was last presented at the Art Commission in 2019. This project is one of DRWC’s connector street projects, similar to Race Street and Spring Garden Street. Connector street project goals are to create safe and attractive passages for pedestrians between adjacent neighborhoods and the Delaware River. The Frankford Avenue Connector Project spans from Girard Avenue to Delaware Avenue, the total study area is just under 1/3 of a mile long. There have been a number of meetings over the last two years with numerous neighborhood associations, other stakeholders including Live Nation, Sugar House (now Rivers) Casino, Philadelphia Streets Department, the Office of Transportation, Infrastructure and Sustainability (OTIS), as well as PennDOT and the I-95 reconstruction team.

Initial comments from the Philadelphia Art Commission Meeting in 2019 included: a) wording on signage should be considered and vetted with the community and public and b) does the property owner have concerns with the existing fence being removed and replaced by the proposed installation?

Mr. Marcinkoski answered these questions noting that the installation is proposed only within the right-of-way. Live Nation, the adjacent property tenant is excited for the changes and approves removing the existing fence. Core Realty, the property owner has been notified of the project with support letters from both DRWC and Live Nation. The signage/wording was finalized through an online survey and public vote – determining that “Welcome to Fishtown!” would be the gateway quote.

The Frankford Avenue Connector Street project is a kit of parts, with 4 phases. Phase 1.1 is being considered today at the May 6 Art Commission Meeting. The other phases will be reviewed separately at later dates. Phase 1.1 begins on the west sidewalk of Frankford Avenue, starting underneath I-95, moving towards Delaware Avenue.

The installation is comprised of two “wall” structures, one wall is the sign wall, the other is the mesh screen wall. The two walls are the same modular structure, each frame is approx. 14’
wide x 13’ tall. Each sits on a foundation knee wall that holds all the electrical utilities to illuminate the modules. For the wording “Welcome to” the frame is illuminated, for “Fishtown!” the text is illuminated.

The hope is that people do not linger or hang out under I-95 but rather give people an animated and safe experience walking down Frankford Avenue. There is no mesh on the “Fishtown!” portion of the signage, but a clear definition of space between the sidewalk and parking lot.

The modular structure will not touch any portion of the I-95 cap, DRWC will be able to control the color and lighting. There will be a series of sensors for the lights - as you walk by each letter, they will light up. The illumination will default with white/red or white/orange but can be lit similar to other Philadelphia skyline buildings during events such as green for an Eagles game. The light levels will not impact traffic and are intended to be secondary lighting for the I-95 renovation which will include primary lighting within the underpass.

These letter modules will be built off-site and delivered, bolted together and connected with utilities. Mr. Marcinkoski noted that the project can be moved during I-95 construction. The materials include galvanized steel frames, painted orange, buff/gray concrete knee wall, and steel mesh panels.

Chairperson Greenberger thanked the Mr. Marcinkoski for the presentation, and had the following questions:

- Will the adjacent sidewalks be redone? Mr. Marcinkoski noted that the west sidewalk on Frankford Avenue will not be repaved but extended to allow for the base of the knee wall. The east side of Frankford Avenue is part of Phase II and is on hold until further clarification comes from the I-95 team, specifically regarding the future sidewalk sizing and location
- Does PennDOT have a plan for lighting for the reconstruction? PennDOT does have lighting plans, and there is ongoing communication between DRWC and PORT.

Commissioner Robert Roesch complimented the project, but did note that the font sizing and spacing for the “I” and “!” in Fishtown! could be a bit wider, noting those modules looked empty.

Commissioner Joe Laragione requested that the Art Commission review this project at the next meeting because a number of details are missed during this virtual meeting format. Mr. Marcinkoski noted that there is a full CD set regarding installation and construction of each letter and module. Chairperson Greenberger asked if the other Commissioners shared the thought, others seemed interested in moving the project forward, noting the details were well thought out.

Commissioner Alminana requested more information about the existing slope of the street and the grading and leveling of the knee wall noting water movement around the base. Mr. Marcinkoski responded that the top of the knee wall would be level and the base would reflect the change in grade. The width of the wall is approximately 2’ wide and is able to sit within the unfinished right-of-way. Mr. Marcinkoski also noted they have provided a maintenance plan to DRWC for future upkeep.
DRWC was asked about the scope of their connector projects. Lizzy Woods responded that Connector Street Projects typically run a block west of I-95.

Upon motion by Mr. Roesch, seconded by Mr. Nasser, the members of the commission voted to recommend final approval of the proposed installation as presented. Commissioners Zacharajasz and Laragione abstained from the vote of this project.

2. 237-19
Rail Line Underpass Enhancement Project – second hearing
Norris Street Underpass, Diamond Street and 10th Street Underpass, Susquehanna Avenue Underpass
Review Type: Public artwork in the street right-of-way
Project Details: Three murals on SEPTA underpasses in North Central Choice Neighborhood
Submitted by: Mural Arts Philadelphia

Todd Bressi – Mural Arts Philadelphia
Marc Dodds – City of Philadelphia, Division of Housing and Community Development

Mr. Bressi introduced the Rail Line Underpass project noting that it was previously seen by the Commission on November 6, 2019. OTIS also presented the lighting components of this project to the Art Commission on December 4, 2019. The lighting is not part of the public art, but they are working together during installation.

The project is part of the larger North Central Choice Neighborhood Plan, funded by HUD. The project encompasses three underpasses within the North Central Choice Neighborhood at Susquehanna Avenue, Diamond Street and 10th Streets, and Norris Street. There have been a number of community and stakeholder meetings to discuss the project. The project relied heavily on community engagement, input and feedback. Artists were asked to host a series of community events in the neighborhood near the underpasses.

The project goals including providing safe and beautiful improvements to several underpasses within the Choice Neighborhood plan. All these murals will take place under the SEPTA regional rail trunk. Mural arts will enter into a maintenance agreement with DHCD and SEPTA (wall owner). Mural Arts will have access to complete minor repairs and remove graffiti.

The Norris Street Underpass is the busiest underpass of the three murals proposed and has access to the Temple Regional Rail Station. Josh Sarantitis and Patrick Dougher designed the mural History in Present Moment (Their Crowns Like Light Beams). The design calls attention to the divine nobility, royal bearing and spirituality of local community. Since November 2019, the mural has gone through minor changes to reflect the lighting of the underpass as well as the design of the bridge with varying depths to portions of the wall. Mr. Bressi noted that the artists and Mural Arts Philadelphia have worked with SEPTA to allow for fabric coverings on the structure, which still allow for inspection by SEPTA engineers.

Diamond Street and 10th Street Underpasses has gone through more changes than either of the other murals since November. There are five walls that are part of this proposal. The infrastructure is varied in this location creating difficult viewsheds and a tunnel like effect. This
series of murals was designed by Legge Lewis Legge, and is called *Diamonds in the Rough*. The mural series is inspired by themes suggested by the community. The design references an eight-step “community building plan” focusing on the principles of family, spirituality, school and community. Each theme is illustrated on a different wall of the Diamond/10th Street underpass. Each mural is a series of vignettes, meant to be seen as an unfolding episode.

The Susquehanna Avenue mural location is the least busy of the three. There is a clear view from one sidewalk to the other. These murals are shorter 45’ to 65’. The mural artists are Anthony Torcasio and Priscilla Bell, *Untitled*. The design focuses on community, abundance, and growth aimed to portray the pivotal strengths that exist within the community. It has an abstract background with a series of plantings and people. There are very few updates, but there are some changes in colors.

Each mural was also presented in a night rendering, showing the lighting rendered in place. Each uses reflective paint but avoids potential conflicts with vehicle headlights. Mural Arts Philadelphia is working with the Managing Directors office regarding when painting can start.

*Chairperson Greenberger noted the extremely well thought out and comprehensive presentation. The Commissioners noted that all of the questions from previous meetings have been addressed.*

*Commissioner Alminana requested that there be some consideration for the column sets surrounding a number of the intersections and proposed murals. Mr. Bressi noted they have considered these columns as a second phase, and hope to work with SEPTA to repaint them in the future.*

*Commissioner Roesch asked if the mural figures are depictions of members of the community. Mr. Bressi noted that virtually everyone shown in the murals are from the neighborhood, but do not depict important figures.*

*Commissioner Febo-San Miguel asked if there is any intent or consideration to translate the text into Spanish as well as English. Mr. Bressi responded that they would be interested in asking the artist to consider incorporating Spanish text.*

*Upon motion by Ms. Febo-San Miguel, seconded by Mr. Alminana, the members of the commission voted to recommend final approval of the proposed murals as presented.*

### 3. 40-20
**1701 Race Street – second hearing**
Review Type: Benjamin Franklin Parkway Area of the Center City Overlay District Project
Details: New construction high-rise with ground floor commercial and residential above
Submitted by: Solomon Cordwell Buenz

Clara Wineberg – Principle, Solomon Cordwell Buenz
Kelly Somers – Project Manager, Solomon Cordwell Buenz
Bryan Hanes – Principle, Studio Bryan Hanes
Ms. Wineberg introduced the project which is within the Benjamin Franklin Parkway Area of Center City. 1701 Race Street is a mixed-use residential building with commercial on the ground floor. Ms. Wineberg introduced Bryan Hanes to discuss the landscape design, which has helped shape the composition of the site.

Mr. Hanes introduced the project noting the Basilica and Cathedral master plan, noting the welcoming garden plaza with a series of spaces that open up onto the public realm. The organization of the site includes a long corridor with the potential of several mid-block crossings. Through the landscape, the intent is to provide a backdrop and separation between the proposed tower and the basilica. The vegetation leads visitors and residents through the site within a garden oasis. There is minimal opportunity to do street planting, so landscape is lush interior to the site. The ground cover is a series of gray and buff colors with movable café seating elements surrounding the commercial space. Mr. Hanes explained how the planting palette takes queues from Sister City Park across 18th Street, creating a block to block connection. Ms. Wineberg noted that the landscape elements have helped engage the tower with the plaza and connects it visually to the cathedral.

Ms. Wineberg noted that the tower design evolved with both materials and articulation. The design now has more transparency and less reflectivity. Current glass selection will appear more residential. Additionally, the tower design now incorporates additional texture through the slab articulation to create a more bird safe design. Ms. Wineberg noted that the design is now responsive to native bird species of the Philadelphia region.

The retail component is now activating the corner of 17th and Race Streets. Ms. Wineberg noted that the streetscape is now activated with seating and ground level elements. The design anticipates and incorporates future activity at this current “dead” corner.

Ms. Wineberg presented a shadow study which shows the tower does not impact the cathedral dome.

Commissioner Alminana asked about the street tree species and noted that the bicycle racks are not the Philadelphia standard. Mr. Alminana requested the bike racks be placed on an angle to incorporate more space for additional bicycle racks. Mr. Hanes noted that London Plane trees were proposed for the street trees and that the development team would consider additional bicycle racks.

Commissioner Alminana noted that the large expanses of glass are still a threat to birds. Ms. Wineberg responded that there are two levels of flight patterns (below 35’ and above 35’). The more transparent glass allows birds to see into the building, creating a safer tower.

Chairperson Greenberger noted that balconies allow for a more residential character, and asked if there was any consideration for balconies. Ms. Wineberg noted that balconies were not considered to allow for sweeping views from within the building. The façade edges and spandrel components give a residential feel. The unit sizes are compact, which also does not allow for balconies.
There was a public question from Neha Vapiwala regarding the Bascilica’s master plan and the potential of phase II. Chairperson Greenberger noted that the Art Commission is only reviewing what is proposed today, and cannot predict market conditions for future projects or phases. The project discussed today is only for the corner of 17th and Race Streets. The Art Commission cannot comment on future phases.

Upon motion by Mr. Alminana, seconded by Mr. Roesch, the members of the commission voted to recommend final approval of the proposed building at 1701 Race Street as presented.

Motion to adjourn the May 6, 2020 Art Commission Meeting. And again, a huge thank you and good luck to Bill Burke on his next adventure!