

**From:** [Bruce](#)  
**To:** [Chris Roberts](#); [Jesse Salomon](#); [Keith Scully](#)  
**Subject:** Art Plan discussion, 2/13 Council Meeting  
**Date:** Friday, February 10, 2017 4:41:19 PM  
**Attachments:** [Public Arts Critique.docx](#)

---

Dear Council Members,

The 6-year Public Art Plan will be the main item for discussion and action next Monday.

I am on the public arts subcommittee, and I have done an analysis of our city's support for public art in recent years compared with our support for the other programs in the PRCS Department.

I would appreciate if you would review the attached analysis in preparation for Monday's discussion.

I will be highlighting this information in my comments at the meeting.

Thanks very much.

Bruce Amundson

January 17, 2017

## The City of Shoreline's Public Arts Program: a Policy Critique

Plans for the public arts program in 2017 and the next six years, as reflected in the new Public Art Master Plan, perpetuate the continuing marginalization of the city's public arts program, as illustrated by the following city decisions and policies:

1. The values and priorities of an organization or agency are reflected in its budget - how resources are allocated. For 2017 the city's proposed budget for the "Public Art Program" is \$81,000, or about 1.5% of the total PRCS budget.

The actual situation for the CITY'S public arts program is even worse than the

1.5% figure suggests because 3/4 of that amount is allocated to the SLFP Arts Council, leaving only \$20,000 for our city arts program from the General Fund. It was also only \$11,000 in 2016. (I am not suggesting that the contracted amount for the SLFP Arts Council be decreased or moved to city support.)

To supplement city public arts support, \$39,300 will be "transferred" from the "Public Art Fund" (the 1% for the arts ordinance). This is controversial among both members of the PRCS Board and the arts subcommittee, because it continues the city's years-long trend of siphoning dollars for staff and operations from a fund initially passed to (only) support installations of permanent public art for the city.

2. Of the nine "Strategic Action Initiatives" identified for the PRCS Department, by the city, only ONE relates to the arts: Enhance Place-making through Public Art. (3 relate to recreation and 4 to parks, including as a "STRATEGIC initiative," something as minimalist as "enhance walkability in parks!")
3. Staffing for the 3 divisions of the Department: Parks division = 7; recreation division = 20.5; arts and cultural services division = .35 (a "special events coordinator" lumped into this division does not really relate to the arts).

Thus, the ratio of recreation staff to arts and cultural services staff is a remarkable 59:1. For 2017 the city staff have declined to support

the recommendation by the public arts coordinator, arts subcommittee and the Board of the PRCS Department to increase the arts coordinator position to 1.0 FTE, but rather propose an increase of a paltry .15 FTE, to .5 FTE. As the arts committee has argued, it is unrealistic to believe that the public arts coordinator can run the arts programs, implement the goals of the new plan, and bring new creative energy to city arts as a 1/2 time position.

The proposed minimal increase would still mean that the ratio of recreational staff to arts staff would be over 40:1. The message this communicates about what the city values is hardly subtle. After over 20 years as a city, this paucity of resources makes a mockery of the claim (in the new Plan's Public Art Vision) that the "City will be among the leaders for Public Art in the region."

4. Options for the organizational structure of a city arts programs: Shoreline versus Edmonds.

Both cities are organized to have Parks, Recreation and Arts and Cultural Services Departments. But here the similarities end.

Within the Edmond's PRCS Department, there is an Arts Commission comprised of 7 members that advises the city and sponsors arts programs. It also has 2.0 FTE staff.

Shoreline established a "public arts subcommittee" within the PRCS Department in 2002 with duties to oversee implementation of the public art plan, advise the Board on acquisitions of permanent art and provide advice on similar arts matters.

This entity contrasts with the Edmonds Arts Commission in that it is an advisory body only without staff or independent resources. Now, in the changes recommended by city staff, even this subcommittee would be eliminated, with all responsibilities for arts policies and public arts management reverting to the PRCS Board, working with the public arts coordinator.

Even "Art Selection Panels" that would be established to advise on the selection of public art for the city "will be discontinued after the PRCS Board has finalized their selection."

5. What the above analysis dramatically communicates is that there has been and continues to be ineffectual advocacy for the arts within city government.

The fact that the recommendation of the Arts Subcommittee to the PRCS Board (a recommendation accepted by that Board) to increase the public arts coordinator position to full-time was denied by staff and budget officials clearly supports the contention that value given to the arts is marginal and effective advocacy for the arts within the structures of the city is lacking.

And, now, with full responsibility for the public arts program reverting to the PRCS Board, this organizational change should give us pause, because even when the Board supported a budgetary change within their Department that would have expanded the arts coordinator position to full-time, the Board and director could not carry the argument with city staff and budget officials.

A better option would be to adopt the Edmond's structure: establish a commission within the PRCS Department to assume major responsibility for running the arts program, led by the public arts coordinator. Since the Board of the PRCS Department must bear some responsibility for the massive imbalance in the allocation of resources (funds and staff) between its three divisions, it is unrealistic to believe that abolishing the Arts Subcommittee and having the PRCS Board take full responsibility for the arts program will bode any better for arts funding in the future.

In summary, while we will continue to perpetuate the myth that the city of Shoreline places a high value on public art, the hard data and the policies analyzed above show otherwise. It is likely the city will move forward with this art plan that contains a number of bold and creative programs, but fail to put its shoulder behind implementing the vision and plan. There is a massive disconnect between what our city claims it wants to do and how it actually allocates its resources. And - it also places a very unrealistic set of expectations on the person filling the public arts coordinator position, given the disconnect between the lofty and complex goals in the plan and the minimal staff time to carry them out. This is an unfortunate situation for an employee, and I believe reflects a dangerous recipe for sustainability and accountability in that position. (I make this observation based on my own management experience and without having had any discussion with the current public arts coordinator.)

My Recommendations:

1. Immediate: Bring this imbalance to the city council at the upcoming budget hearings, and urge them to start to take modest action to address the unfortunate imbalance in the allocation of resources within the three divisions

of the PRCS Department. A specific request should be to increase the public arts coordinator position to full-time starting in 2017, funded from the General Fund.

2. Immediate and ongoing over the 6-year plan: increase funding from the General Fund each year for the public arts program. The most realistic option for implementing Goal 3 of the Plan, "Achieve Greater Financial Sustainability for the Public Art Program," (of the 10 options listed) is to increase General Fund support. This would simply treat public art like any other essential community service, sustained mostly by core city funds.
3. Longer-term: Establish an Arts Commission within the PRCS Department, with authority and responsibility for arts management and advocacy, as reference in point #4 above (and as reflected in the government structures of Edmonds, Seattle and most other cities.)

Shoreline has a long way to go to show that the arts are as important as other city services and programs. The above analysis is meant to establish a more objective, quantitative picture of current arts support and to strengthen our arguments for something closer to fairness in our city's support for the arts. Until now, I believe, this data has not been applied to the city's policy and budgetary deliberations, and few of our residents are aware of the situation.

Bruce Amundson  
Member, Public Arts Subcommittee  
Shoreline Arts Benefactor