



Staff Reports

File #: 795-2017, **Version:** 1

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of City Council

From: Rick Tooker, Community Development Director

Prepared By: Shari Cooper, Development Project Coordinator

TITLE:

Dwight Murray Plaza Public Art Project

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

1. Approve the concept design for the Dwight Murray Plaza Public Art project; and
2. Determine that the project is exempt from CEQA; and
3. Approve Amendment No. 1 to Agreement C2017 007 with Artist Ned Kahn in the amount of \$180,000 for design and installation of the artwork, and authorize the City Manager to execute the Amendment.

Background

In 1974, the City's Redevelopment Agency dedicated a newly constructed downtown plaza and named it after one of the community's most beloved doctors, Dr. Dwight H. Murray, Sr. The Dwight Murray Plaza (the "Plaza") was for many years known for its prominent clock tower, outdoor conversation and entertainment pit, and waterfall fountain. Over time, however, the clock tower and fountain fell into disrepair, and in the early 2000s the Redevelopment Agency removed the clock tower, repurposed the fountain into a landscaped planter, and installed benches and tables with seats as an interim improvement until such time the City decided to undertake a more comprehensive renovation of the space.

Given its visible and central location on First and Brown streets, locals and visitors use the Plaza as a convenient downtown meeting place. In 2015, the City Council identified the renovation of the Plaza as a high priority project and subsequently approved \$1.5 million for redesign and construction of the Plaza and an additional \$250,000 from the Public Art Fund for public art in the Plaza in accordance with the approved Public Art Master Plan (June 2014).

In early 2015, the City engaged a planning and design consultant to prepare a new design plan for the Plaza and identify locations for public art as part of that process. The design process included extensive public input which guided the plan's final layout and design. Elements determined to be most important in the Plaza's redesign included:

1. flexibility of space for special events;
2. shade cast by tree canopies and flexible shade that can be adjusted; such as through moveable umbrellas;
3. visibility from First Street and Brown Street to the adjacent businesses;
4. quality paving and materials, flexible seating areas, and attractive lighting;
5. integration with and connection to the Brown Street Corridor;
6. a flexible and low maintenance water element that can be turned off; and
7. high-quality public art.

On May 17, 2016 staff presented the preferred conceptual plan to the Council, who approved the plan and directed the construction be completed prior to the Archer Hotel opening. (At that time, the hotel was expected to open in late spring 2017; however, due to weather-related construction delays, the hotel opening has adjusted to late summer 2017.) The approved plan initially included a circular shaped at-grade bubbler fountain located in the center of the Plaza. This fountain maintained flexibility of space as it could be turned off during events. As the City began working on the engineering specifications to obtain construction bids for the project, Public Works staff discovered that State law would require installation of public restrooms with changing areas because of the interactive nature of the fountain, and provided this information as part of a Capital Improvement Projects update on September 6, 2016. At this meeting, the Council directed staff to pursue options for an alternative water element without the interactive component that preserves the flexibility of the space, and explore incorporating a water element into the public art in lieu of a stand-alone water feature.

Public Art Selection Process

In response to Council direction, staff issued a “Request for Qualifications” to solicit artists who specialize in water elements incorporated into outdoor public art. The City received six responses to the RFQ. The City Manager appointed a selection panel (“the Panel”) to guide the submittal review process and vet the qualifications for the project. The Panel consisted of two members of the Public Art Steering Committee, one member from the Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission, one business owner fronting on the Plaza, and two representatives from the Downtown Napa Association. After careful review of the qualifications submittals, the Panel selected Ned Kahn as the artist for the project. Mr. Kahn is a Sonoma County resident and the recipient of many prestigious awards and grants. His artworks are displayed around the world and are known for incorporating natural elements (e.g., wind, light/fire, water, fog, and sand) to create engaging and experiential artwork.

Mr. Kahn initially presented 10 design concepts to the Panel. Some of the designs incorporated water in the art in a traditional manner where it could be seen and heard. Other design concepts included water contained within the artwork but in a non-traditional way, such as in vessels. Other options did not include water but provided the appearance and feel of water utilizing wind, light, and movement. The Panel weighed each concept over a series of meetings and unanimously supported a non-water design. The proposed art piece has been reviewed by the Public Art Steering Committee and Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee as discussed further below.

Proposed Art Piece

The design concept entitled “Veil of Water” attempts to capture the essence of water utilizing wind, light, and movement (see Attachment 1, “Veil of Water” concept). The artwork is an elevated and suspended structure in the shape of a large ring, approximately 15 feet above the Plaza surface, with a diameter of 48 feet. The stainless steel ring supports thousands of anodized aluminum squares that hang upon cables and shimmer in the wind. The technology employed enables the hanging squares to move, driven by airflow regardless of whether it is a windy or calm day. The 3” x 3” aluminum shapes also reflect surrounding colors (e.g., the sky, trees, pavement below, etc.). The artist will engineer the structure so that that morning light penetrates into the Plaza, and during the afternoon hours the artwork can cast a small amount of shade in addition to the tree canopies in the Plaza. Four angled, stainless steel poles will support the artwork. The poles will be located a distance outside the edges of the ring.

The Panel unanimously supported the “Veil of Water” concept, concluding that the artwork fulfills many of the goals of the original plan. As proposed, “Veil of Water” will generally respond to criteria 1 through 7 listed above. The flexibility of the space, which was one of the driving criteria for the Plaza design, will be limited only by the four support poles and the overhead ring 15 feet in the air.

On February 28, 2017, the Public Art Steering Committee (PASC) received a presentation of the “Veil of Water” concept by the Committee Chair, who also served as a Panel member. The PASC unanimously supported a recommendation to Council to approve the “Veil of Water” concept design for Dwight Murray Plaza.

Subsequently, on March 8, 2017, staff presented the art concept to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission. While overall the Commissioners liked the art concept, some expressed concern stating the art might not be the right fit for Napa; does not reflect the public’s support for a water feature; might not provide adequate shade and might reflect light that is too bright; and the suspended ring above the Plaza may be too large and the support structure might interfere with the future programming of the space. After the presentation and discussion, the majority of the Commission voted in support the art concept.

Based on the advisory recommendations of the Panel, Public Art Steering Committee, and Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission, and because the art accomplishes many of the project goals within the budget previously approved by City Council, staff recommends Council approve the “Veil of Water” public art concept and Amendment No. 1 to Agreement C2017 007 for Ned Kahn to complete the design, engineering and installation of the artwork as provided in Attachment 2, “Amendment No. 1 to Agreement No. C2017 007.”

FINANCIAL IMPACTS:

The recommended action is within a previously approved budget within the Public Art Fund for the development and construction of public art in the Plaza and will have no impact on the General Fund.

CEQA:

The Community Development Director recommends that the City Council determine that the

Recommended Action described in this Agenda Report is exempt from CEQA, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15303(e) (accessory structure).

DOCUMENTS ATTACHED:

Attachment 1: "Veil of Water" public art concept by Ned Kahn

Attachment 2: Amendment No. 1 to Agreement No. C2017 007 between the City of Napa and artist Ned Kahn

NOTIFICATION:

The Panel guiding the public art proposal, Public Art Steering Committee, and Parks & Recreation Commission have been advised of the Council's agenda.