



Cultural Arts Programs

Cultural Arts & Marketing Division

TO: Public Art Advisory Committee
ATTN: Deborah Lozier and Andrew Woodd, Co-chairs
FROM: Steven Huss, Cultural Arts Manager
Christin Hablewitz, Measure DD Public Art Project Manager
DATE: July 12, 2010
RE: Final Designs for the Oakland Watershed Art Marker Public Art Project from
Wowhaus, Ene Osteraas-Constable and Scott Constable

SUMMARY

Staff recommends that the Public Art Advisory Committee (PAAC) reviews and approves the final designs for the Measure DD: Oakland Watershed Art Marker public art project. The artist team Wowhaus, consisting of Ene Osteraas-Constable and Scott Constable, is presenting their final designs to PAAC. The project goal is to create a prototype watershed art marker and to fabricate and install a first series of markers based on this prototype at various key locations in the Oakland watershed systems. The watershed art markers will identify and celebrate the role of the watershed systems of Oakland, including creeks, lakes, and the estuary, to meet the goals of the Oakland Watershed Program and Measure DD Oakland Trust for Clean Water & Safe Parks. *This voting item is being re-presented to the PAAC due to a lack of quorum at its June 7, 2010 meeting.*

FISCAL IMPACT

Currently, the artist team is in contract with the City of Oakland for the design of the artwork prototype and fabrication and installation of the first series of markers for a total contract amount of \$87,000, this approval is in accordance to the contract.

BACKGROUND

Funds authorized through the voter-approved Measure DD Oakland Trust for Clean Water & Safe Parks have been allocated for Oakland Watershed improvements, including creek renovation and water quality projects. Oakland is home to 15 main creeks and over 40 smaller tributaries, all of which play a vital role in the City's health and well-being. These waterways provide plant and wildlife habitat, stormwater transport, flood management and water cleansing functions as well as valuable recreational and aesthetic benefit for Oakland residents. Although historically contiguous from the Oakland Hills to the San Francisco Bay, all of Oakland's creeks are now partially or extensively buried or diverted into culverts and storm drains. Their lack of visibility in certain areas of the city reduces overall understanding of their role and value.

To enhance the historic, cultural, aesthetic and interpretive potential of the often-overlooked creeks system and the City's "crown jewel," Lake Merritt, \$87,000 was allocated to commission



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an artist or artist team to create a prototype interpretive artwork marker that will identify the location of creek nodes and draw attention to the value of the City's many creek habitats. The selected artist team will also fabricate and install a series of three to five markers based on the prototype at various celebrated locations in Oakland.

The artwork marker design is intended to become an iconic symbol representing the citywide watershed awareness program. The markers will encompass the built environment as well as open creek locations. The placement of each marker will invite discovery of the next while building watershed awareness. The artwork prototype will be owned by the City of Oakland and may be replicated in future series as funding becomes available for the identification of additional creek habitats and nodes throughout the city.

At its regular meeting on June 7, 2010, the PAAC by consensus approved the final designs presented by the Wowhaus team. This item is re-presented for a formal vote of the Committee.

PUBLIC ART PROJECT CONCEPT DESCRIPTION

Wowhaus envisions the Oakland Watershed Markers as iconic, vibrant art forms that celebrate the vital ecology of Oakland's watershed and creeks. Cast in durable bronze with a contrasting dark patina, these low-relief pieces inset in sidewalks and walks will feature beautifully detailed naturalistic imagery that evokes the vibrant ecosystems of the watershed. The artwork is inspired by the artists' dialogues through community meetings and presentations with community members who shared their memories and knowledge of Oakland's creeks and watershed. These exchanges revealed a series of beloved, universal symbols, images that evoke a healthy watershed for people from a spectrum of cultural backgrounds and ages.*

In the design, the symbols are integrated into sculptural forms that evoke "stepping stones". The five stones invite the public to interact with the artwork by walking across a symbolic creek or waterway, as if crossing an actual body of water. The stones (whose surface is cast from real rocks) are surrounded by dynamic, undulating lines that evoke water in motion. In addition to these elements, the markers will be accompanied by text stamped into the concrete that will indicate the name of the creek and watershed associated with each site; a slogan or saying such as "Creeks Beneath Our Feet" may also accompany the artwork. A "North Marker" consisting of an arrow and the letter "N" marking North will orient the viewer to their place in the landscape.

The cast-bronze images will be rendered in relief of no more than ¼" depth, per ADA requirements. Highlighted areas of bronze will catch the light, evoking water, while the recesses will be dark, resulting in a striking, bold composition overall. To install the artwork, a portion of the sidewalk will be removed with the artwork inset flush into newly poured concrete. Wowhaus proposes incorporating "glitter grit", an industrial strength aggregate that has the effect of glitter. Subtly catching the light as people pass by, the glitter will draw viewers to the art and mimic the effect of light sparkling on water. (This simple, permanent finish is commonly used by hotels in their sidewalks. However, use of the glitter grit is still subject to agreement with the Public Works Agency.) A series of five individual "stepping stones", ranging in size from 15"l x 16"w



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to 18”l x 20”w would be inset in the sidewalk. Patterns evoking waterflow and water creatures would surround each stone.

*NOTE: Among the recurring images that evoked a healthy watershed for many community members were:

- Frogs – Community members recalled playing in the creeks as children, discovering frogs and other creatures that thrive in healthy creeks. (The artists have included imagery of the cycle of life from egg to tadpole to frog, symbolizing the cyclical nature of a healthy ecosystem.)
- Fish – Rainbow trout are found in some Oakland creeks; the symbol of fish was universally identified by the majority of people as a vibrant symbol of healthy water systems.
- Insects: Dragonflies are fondly recalled as companions for those who frequent the creeks.
- Salamander.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE COMMITTEE

Staff recommends that the Public Art Advisory Committee accepts the final designs for the Oakland Watershed Art Marker project. Once accepted Wowhaus will continue on to fabrication phase.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven Huss
Cultural Arts Manager / Public Art Coordinator