

# The Record

## Open-air museum for New West?

[Theresa McManus](#) / Royal City Record

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An outdoor art exhibition that features world-class international sculptures and performances could be coming to New Westminster.

New Westminster city council has directed staff, in consultation with the city's public art advisory committee, to explore the benefits and implications of the city's involvement in the 2013 to 2015 Vancouver Biennale. Barrie Mowatt, founder and president of the Vancouver Biennale, and Miriam Blume, a board member of the Vancouver Biennale, recently spoke to city council about the potential for the event to uniquely build destinations and community in host communities.

Mowatt said the Biennale is basically an open-air museum. Blume said the organizers' focus is not only to attract great contemporary artists, but also breakthrough artists who are about to come on to the world stage.

"There are no tickets, there are no line-ups, there are no admissions," she said. "We place art in unexpected places. We are creating cultural experiences where people

The concept of the Vancouver Biennale is to provide great art where people live, work, play and transit.

"The community has really embraced the Biennale," Blume said.

Blume believes the Biennale provides a very unique ability in serving as an access point for "social bridging," noting a whole generation of young people is growing up in a sort of self-cocooning, narcissist way because of technology.

"You see everything and everybody. They are talking, they are smiling, they are asking questions. They are tweeting. They are drawing," she said about people's actions around the sculptures. "They are engaging as a community."

Blume said the Biennale is a "differentiator" that gives people a reason to come to New Westminster.

Those visits are assisted by the marketing "machine" that's part of the Biennale.

After falling in love with sculptures in their own communities, Blume said they often go to other communities to view their sculptures. Along the way, they may stop for lunch, gas and shopping.

Mowatt said the Biennale organizers see some real potential in New Westminster, especially with its five SkyTrain stations.

"The old downtown core is exciting for us," he said. "We see some real potential there."

Coun. Jaimie McEvoy believes the Biennale is a great way to further enhance the image of New Westminster as a

modern, rising and hip place to be.

"Forget Yaletown, forget Steveston - they've got nothing on us," he said.

Coun. Bill Harper said interest in public art is skyrocketing in the Lower Mainland.

"I think it's a good program," Harper said. "For us, it's just a question of how we are going to mesh, how we are doing to deal with it around the table in terms of all the nuts and bolts."

Coun. Jonathan Cote said he's seen many of the sculptures featured in past Biennale events, which speaks to organizers' goal of placing them in places where people can experience them. He believes it fills a void in terms of how people engage in arts and culture.

"I think this is a really interesting program," he said.

Coun. Betty McIntosh questioned whether a city's existing public art is featured in the Biennale. She noted that New Westminster has mosaic tiles in various neighbourhoods and art features at Westminster Pier Park.

As part of the last Tour De Biennale, organizers developed a map that featured shorter routes, which included existing public art installations in the vicinity of sculptures included in the Biennale.

An interactive map on the website, appropriate for tablet and cellphone screens, will be able to map and distinguish Biennale and city owned artworks.

"We spend a lot of time working with the city on locations," Blume said. "We want locations to make sense in terms of cycling tours, in terms of walking tours, in terms of transit. Otherwise it doesn't work."

Coun. Chuck Puchmayr said he could support the concept if the financial contribution falls within what the city has already allocated toward public art and doesn't cost any additional money.

While he supports the arts, Puchmayr said the city has to be "very prudent" with its expenditures.

Greg Magirescu, the city's manager of arts and cultural development, said staff's intention is that the project would be covered within the city's existing public art fund.

Magirescu said the public art advisory committee has been exploring the issue. The presentation was designed to familiarize council with the project that's being considered for New Westminster.

Now going into its third event, the Biennale is an outdoor art exhibition that takes place every two years.

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