

# The Record

## New Westminster isn't wowed by all of the proposed public art

[Theresa McManus](#) / Royal City Record

April 17, 2014 04:33 PM



Two of of three: New Westminster city council likes the Blue Trees that will adorn New Westminster during the Vancouver Biennale but isn't keen on the installation proposed for a legacy project in the city. Photograph By Vancouver Biennale/Clayton Perry

The Vancouver Biennale is proving that beauty is indeed in the eye of the beholder.

New Westminster's public art advisory committee has recommended that city council proceed with three installations as part of the event: WOW New Westminster by Jose Resende would be located at Westminster Pier Park; Blue Trees by Konstantin Dimopolous would go on Columbia Street; and Public Furniture/Urban Trees by Hugo Franca would be installed at a to-be-determined location. City council supported the Blue Trees and Public Furniture/Urban Trees installations, but opposed the Resende piece, which was to be a legacy piece that could be a permanent fixture in the city.

"He is like the Picasso of South America. It's true," said Coun. Bill Harper.

Resende's installation consists of four shipping containers positioned in two V shapes on the northeastern end of

the timber wharf section of Westminster Pier Park. Proposed for installation in September, the installation would cost \$65,000 to install, \$17,500 to take down and \$70,560 to relocate to another location if the city chose to move it elsewhere.

"You add that all up and that is a lot of money for rusting containers," said Coun. Chuck Puchmayr.

Dean Gibson, the city's director of parks, culture and recreation, said the intention of the Vancouver Biennale was that the public art initiatives be curated as one project. He told council that the Vancouver Biennale will be marketing and promoting all of the installations as part of a region-wide effort.

According to Gibson, the Vancouver Biennale staff needs an agreement in place as soon as possible so it can finalize agreements with the various artists taking part in the event.

"It is meant to educate the viewer and provide conversation around New Westminster's historic identity as a hub of shipping, industry and transportation in British Columbia," stated a synopsis of the Resende piece. "The artist, Jose Resende, is inspired by finding the sculptural in everyday life. He feels the constant presence of shipping containers is noticeable in New Westminster, and intends to turn them into sculpture and re-image them through an artistic lens. The containers are meant to oxidize naturally so no paint will be applied to them."

Coun. Jonathan Cote said it would be a shame if the city lost out on the Vancouver Biennale because it didn't like one of the installations.

"Good public art is supposed to get people, talking and get people thinking," he said.

Coun. Betty McIntosh suggested council table the report and ask the Vancouver Biennale to explain the concept of having rusty shipping containers as part of a public art installation. If a resolution can't be found, she said the city will have lost out on an opportunity to take part in the biennale.

Puchmayr said he considers it to be a "twist of the knife" to have public art in the city using shipping containers because the city is overwhelmed by tractor-trailer traffic. Puchmayr said public art should be controversial, but he doesn't like the work being proposed.

Mayor Wayne Wright said he'd prefer the Public Furniture/Urban Trees by Hugo Franca to be considered as the city's legacy piece to be permanently located in the city. The piece is intended to stimulate conversations around New Westminster's milling, logging and manufacturing heritage.

"Brazilian artist Hugo Franca transforms fallen trees into sculptures. His sustainable design process respects the natural features of the wood, promoting minimum waste. It brings to light the beauty of the natural organic forms, line, holes and cracks of the trees," states an overview of the piece. "The tree's memory remains alive in art and is brought back to the community in harmonious ways with the landscape. Traditionally, Franca only works on species native to Brazil. This is the first time in his 20-year career that he is creating public sculpture outside Brazil and using a variety of local wood species (cedar, fir, spruce)."

In 2013, city council approved in principle a recommendation from the public art advisory committee for a series of projects in 2014, including the Vancouver Biennale. The city's 2014 budget includes \$90,000 for Vancouver Biennale projects.

Public Furniture/Urban Trees is proposed to be installed in June 2014 and remain in the city until the fall of 2015, and WOW New Westminster is proposed to be installed in September 2014 and remain in place unless the city chooses to de-install it or relocate it at the city's expense. Blue Trees aims to be installed in the spring of 2015 and wouldn't be desinstalled because the blue pigment be placed on trees on Columbia Street will naturally fade away over time.

New Westminster is one of several municipalities working with Vancouver Biennale on the event, which will feature artists from the Middle East, North Africa, Asia, Canada, Northern Europe and South America. In addition to “open-air museums” featuring public art, Vancouver Biennale includes education program, an international artists residency program, a tour de Biennale charity bike ride, the Conversations lecture series, and Biennale CineFest, a documentary arts cinema initiative.

© Royal City Record