

Controversial art green lighted



By New Westminister News Leader

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Get ready New Westminister for four big, rusty transport containers sticking out of Westminister Pier Park. Or be prepared to be wowed by a beautiful piece of public art.

It's up to the eye of the beholder to determine which statement is true.

Like it or not, the work—Wow New Westminister—will soon grace the city's riverfront.

Council approved the piece by Brazilian artist Resende on Monday. [It will be one of three works from the Vancouver Biennale society.](#)

Two of them, Blue Trees and Public Furniture/Urban trees, will stay in New West for two years. But Wow New Westminister is a legacy for the city to keep.

The decision came after extensive discussion at the council table and in the community. Opinions were many and varied. Coun. Jaimie McEvoy couldn't make up his mind so he solicited opinions on Facebook and got 30 responses.

"It's been a long time since I've had so much input on any decision," said McEvoy. "I think there is such a thing as bad art ... I have a divided opinion about this. I don't think boxcars or shipping containers on an angle constitute art in any meaningful way."

McEvoy pointed out the Biennale proposal had gone through the proper process with the city, so in the end he supported it. "I strongly dislike the containers, but I don't want to sabotage the public art program in its infancy."

Only Mayor Wayne Wright and Coun. Chuck Puchmayr voted against spending \$90,000 on the projects.

Installing the 40-foot containers will cost \$65,000. If the city wants to remove them after two years there would be a \$17,000 price tag. Putting them somewhere else would cost \$75,000.

Puchmayr called it an art rental program.



"That is not the public art model I want to see in the city. I want to see a model that creates public art locally," said Puchmayr. "One of the concerns I have with the containers is that it's old, rusted containers that will be reengineered into a shape on our pier park, which for the longest time we've been told has structural issues."

Parks and recreation director Dean Gibson said an engineering study determined the Timber Wharf would support the containers.

Wright did not like Vancouver Biennale's terms forcing the city to take all three projects or none of them. He was also uncomfortable the Biennale was determining where the projects would go. Blue Trees by Konstantin Dimopolous will be on Columbia Street. A location for Public Furniture/Urban Trees by Hugo Franca has not been determined.

WOW didn't seem like art at first to Coun. Lorrie Williams.

"It took some thinking about it. I wasn't sure I liked it either," said Williams. "Art is very personal, everyone has a reaction to it. I know people who don't like the Mona Lisa and it's supposed to be one of the greatest pieces of art in the world."

She also believes there should be more use of local artists for the city's public art. "But I don't think we should shut the door on international art."

Coun. Betty McIntosh also had reservations. But the more questions she got answered the more comfortable she was.

"I think this is an opportunity to be a city to be looked at in the whole region," said McIntosh. "This is quite a cost effective way to get public art. Public art is not cheap, it is quite expensive no matter what you do."

Architect Eric Pattison gave his support to council as a member of the public art advisory committee. He said the Brazilian curator the Biennale hired was "flabbergasted by the site" with all its movement of people, trucks, trains and the river.

"He thought they needed something that spoke to the robustness of the site," said Pattison. "That's what it's all about, getting people talking ... On some level they're all going to be controversial to somebody."

The containers are scheduled to be installed in the fall. But Gibson said Biennale officials were open to changing that date so it doesn't conflict with the Wait For Me Daddy Sculpture expected to be unveiled in October.

