

The Record

Public art project OK'd

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Art scene: City council passed a motion to accept an installation by Jose Resende at Westminster Pier Park, which got mixed reviews at city council, and three other artworks on Monday to participate in Vancouver Biennale. Photograph By Submitted photo/THE RECORD

The topic of public art has garnered more discussion for one city councillor this week than traffic, in the buildup to a vote on whether to participate in a public art exhibition that will cost the City of New Westminster up to \$90,000. When he talks to people in the community, Coun. Jonathan Cote said they usually want to discuss traffic issues. "Not this week," he said Monday. "It was definitely all about public art."

Council [passed the controversial motion \(http://www.royalcityrecord.com/news/new-west-public-art-proposal-delivers-the-wow-factor-1.1007587\)](http://www.royalcityrecord.com/news/new-west-public-art-proposal-delivers-the-wow-factor-1.1007587), with Mayor Wayne Wright and Coun. Chuck Puchmayr opposed, to proceed with three installations as part of the Vancouver Biennale, a public art exhibition that features works by celebrated and emerging international artists.

Cote supports having the city take part in the Vancouver Biennale, saying it's done great work in the past and has brought some thought-provoking pieces to the region. He believes the Vancouver Biennale is an opportunity to bring some interesting pieces to New Westminster that spark conversation in the community.

WOW New Westminster, by Jose Resende, would be located at Westminster Pier Park in September; *Blue Trees*, by Konstantin Dimopolous, would go on Columbia Street in the spring of 2015; and *Public Furniture/Urban Trees*, by Hugo Franca, would be installed at a to-be-determined location this June.

Concerns about the Resende installation had threatened to derail the entire project.

New Westminster city council tabled consideration of the recommendation last week to allow time for community

input and to wait until all council members were able to vote on the matter.

A member of the public art advisory committee, the group that recommended the city take part in the art exhibit, told council Monday night that the Vancouver Biennale is an "exciting opportunity" for the city.

"We didn't make our decision lightly," she said. "We did really think long and hard, and thought with sober thought whether this would work or not."

Coun. Bill Harper, a member of the public art advisory committee, said the three pieces "balance one another out" in some ways, as some are quite acceptable to most people. Others, such as the Resende piece, ignite a serious debate.

"People like public art," he said. "People like their cities to be decorated, if you will."

Coun. Betty McIntosh said she's been approached by a number of people in the past week who were "very, very unsure" about the Wow New Westminster piece. While she shared some of their reservations, she found that the longer she spoke to people, the more they supported the city taking part in the Vancouver Biennale.

"The economics of the Biennale, I don't think we should ever put aside," McIntosh said. "I think we have to acknowledge it's a larger world than New Westminster."

The Vancouver Biennale is an opportunity for New Westminster to have public art that will attract people from throughout the region, she said.

But Coun. Chuck Puchmayr views participation in the Vancouver Biennale as "renting" art and would prefer money go toward permanent installations.

"That isn't the public art model I would like to see for the city," he said.

Puchmayr also believes there are local artists who are capable of creating public art for New Westminster.

Coun. Jaimie McEvoy agrees the city should look at works by some local talent but supported participation in the Vancouver Biennale, noting it's been a long time since he's had as much input on an issue as this one.

"I strongly dislike the shipping containers," he added. "I don't want to sabotage a public art program in its infancy." Mayor Wayne Wright is no fan of Wow New Westminster and joined Puchmayr in opposing the city's participation in the program.

He wants assurances that Wow New Westminster won't be installed at a time when it conflicts with city's unveiling of the Wait for Me, Daddy memorial in Hyack Square.

In 2013, city council approved, in principle, a recommendation from the public art advisory committee for a series of projects this year, including the Vancouver Biennale.

The city's 2014 budget includes the \$90,000 for Vancouver Biennale projects, which includes the three public art installations in "open-air museums," as well as an 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, as well as many marketing, press and social media opportunities.

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