

Council approves money for Blue Trees

Motion to provide \$7,500 toward art installation narrowly passes

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Squamish residents can expect to see blue trees in town soon. The art project is the creation of Konstantin Dimopoulos of Australia. Photo: file

Be on the lookout for blue trees, now that council has narrowly passed a motion Tuesday night to pay \$7,500 to the Vancouver Biennale for the Blue Trees installation.

Blue Trees is the last project in the 2014-2016 Vancouver Biennale in Squamish.

Barrie Mowatt, president and founder Vancouver Biennale, stated in a letter presented to council that if the funds were not delivered by Wednesday (Oct. 7), the final project could not go ahead.

“Without receipt of this money, there will be no Blue Trees project in Squamish,” Mowatt stated in his letter addressed to Mayor Patricia

Heintzman.

There was confusion over the final payment because the original proposal had a viewing platform tower at the Vik Muniz “Wolf” installation in downtown Squamish, according to the mayor.

“Instead of building something, there was something that was donated for the year and a half it was going on,” said Heintzman, adding that the district did receive other things from the project it didn’t expect, such as to keep the Hugo Franca Public Furniture pieces, which have been donated to various groups in the district.

In his letter, Mowatt said Biennale “has far exceeded its original proposal,” despite not delivering the platform for the wolf art as originally proposed.

Public Furniture alone is worth \$430,000, he stated.

Joanne Greenlees, general manager of financial services at the district, told council the final money had not been paid by staff because it was felt the Blue Trees project could be funded by Biennale out of what the organization didn’t spend on the expected platform.

“From the financial perspective, we paid about \$7,600 more than we ought to have paid for the 2014 program, with respect to not receiving the asset – the \$15,000 platform. So on that basis, our contention is we had overpaid because we didn’t receive what we were to be receiving and therefore they had in-pocket... \$7,600 worth of cash to contribute to the Blue Trees,” she said, adding it could also be considered that in the end, Biennale delivered more than expected.

“I think that is where the decision actually lies.”

Greenlees said Biennale had not provided a breakdown of what was done with the \$15,000 paid for the viewing platform.

“I have never received an accounting, only the contention that the money has been spent,” said Greenlees.

Councillors Doug Race, Karen Elliott and Peter Kent voted against approving the final payment, but with Heintzman, Jason Blackman-Wulff, Susan Chapelle and Ted Prior in favour, the motion carried.

Elliott said it was the lack of accounting that she objected to.

“I just think that we set a pretty high bar for our community groups that come to us for grants and aid and all that sort of thing, and they have to provide financials and provide an accounting of how they are going to spend that money down to the dollar and then we make a decision,” she said. “I don’t disagree that in some respects [Biennale] have over-delivered, but I still want to know how they spent their money.”

For Heintzman, it was about more than dickering over the final payment. “I think love it or hate it, the Biennale has elevated the debate and the conversation about public art, and I just don’t want a bad taste left in our mouths over what is really not a huge amount of money,” she said, adding the \$7,500 was not new money but funds that had been budgeted in previous years.

The funds to pay for the Blue Trees will come from the accumulated surplus.

The Blue Trees project, which will involve temporarily pigmenting existing trees in town to a blue colour, has been slated to begin this fall and is the vision of artist Konstantin Dimopoulos of Australia.