

# DNV proposal for \$7 million worth of developer-funded public art failed to get rave reviews

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June 1, 2018

An ambitious plan to fund a decade of Public Art in the District of North Vancouver faced heavy criticism when presented to the council during an April Council Workshop. The draft plan proposed an investment of \$7 million between 2018 and 2031, funded primarily by property developers through their Community Amenity Contributions (CAC).

The plan presented by Public Art Coordinator Lori Phillips and Heather Turner, Director of Recreation & Culture, included \$5 million for site-specific works in each of the four new "town centres" — Lynn Valley, Lynn Creek, Lions Gate, and Maplewood Village — and \$2 million for works placed in areas like Edgemont, Queensdale, and Deep Cove, as well as alongside trails and in parks. The increased funding would also ensure that existing and future works can be maintained.

Councillor Doug MacKay-Dunn was the first to object, explaining his opposition to spending CAC funds on art by saying, "Art is in the eye of the beholder, but good sidewalks are not." MacKay-Dunn requested that the council review the practice, which had been part of the funding formula for more than a decade. "If that money isn't going into community needs, real needs, that's wasting money... it's being obtained under false pretences."

Jim Hanson expressed "sticker shock" at the \$7 million price tag, and suggested that the money spent on "decorations" along the Mount Seymour Parkway would have been better spent on "people who are living under the causeway (to) bring them into a more civilized way of life." Referring to the photo of artist Lawrence Argent's "I See What You Mean," the great blue bear that is part of the Colorado Convention Centre, Hanson said "(7 million dollars) is a lot of money for ceramic bears".

Public Art in North Vancouver is funded in three ways: through direct civic spending from the regular annual budget; as a part of large district capital projects like pools or plazas; or by contributions to the Community Amenity Fund. The selection of art works and the management of the overall public art program is overseen by the North Vancouver Recreation and Culture Commission, which manages over 150 works in the city and district. The district is currently home to 64 works valued at \$2 million, two thirds of which came from developer-funded projects.

There are three kinds of public art projects. Civic public art which incorporates public art into municipal buildings, parks and infrastructure projects; developer public art where developers commission site-specific works of art which are integrated into their development projects; and community public art which supports small-scale public art projects proposed jointly by community groups and artists.

At present, capital projects like the new Delbrook Recreation Centre designate 1% of construction costs for public art, to a maximum of \$500,000. Major private develop-



Referring to the photo of artist Lawrence Argent's "I See What You Mean," the great blue bear that is part of the Colorado Convention Centre, Councillor Jim Hanson said "(7 million dollars) is a lot of money for ceramic bears". The bear is actually made of plastic and a couple stories tall. It was used as an example of successful public art in the PowerPoint presentation to the council.

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ments like the Seyllynn Village or the Lynn Valley Town Centre earmark between 5% and 10% of their CAC to fund new works. Both of these are in line with other municipalities like Burnaby and Richmond. Where the district lags behind other Lower Mainland governments is in direct "civic funding" from its annual budget. In 2017, the District spent only 57 cents per resident on public art compared to the city's \$2.40 or Richmond's \$1.50 per capita.

Councillor Mathew Bond, the youngest

member of the council, was enthusiastic in his support for the plan. "As the district continues to grow and develop, public art is going to be much more important than it has been in the past." He believes that it is important for his children to be surrounded by art in their community, and that this is one of the ways that they build a strong connection to the place where they live. He recounted his experiences walking around cities like Toronto and Montreal, enjoying the mix of "modern art, conceptual art, or historical references to what a place was, what it is, and what it will be in the future," describing a "vast difference to walking around the district".

Bond believes that a more robust public art policy, funded through a regular, consistent tax levy, would be better in the long run.

Concerns went beyond funding, and the council had many questions about how works were chosen, and why the program relies heavily on "professional" artists. Currently an "arm's length panel of experts" chooses artists and art concepts, in consultation with stakeholders like developers and architects. Several councillors challenged the accepted practice of having artists and works selected by a panel of peer experts. Councillor Robin Hicks said that he was "not sure how we select works," and others suggested that money could be saved by hiring artists who were not "professionals who make their whole income from art," or by finding artists who would donate works as "advertising."

The council will review the Community Amenity Fund in July. The Public Art Program will present their completed plan for approval at a later date.