In Attendance
Luckett
Arimoto-Mercer
Goulata
Parsakian
Gable (DPW)
Lucas (DOMI)

Staff Present
Dash
Minnaert
Cavalline

Agenda Items Covered in These Minutes

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A. Approval of Minutes

Roll call. Luckett asks Commissioners to review and comment on minutes from October 2020. Goulata motions to approve the minutes with noted corrections, seconded by Parsakian. All ayes. Motion carries.

B. Items for Review

1. Smallman Street Plaza Paving Project – The Office of Public Art Conceptual Review

   Derek Reese of OPA introduces the application, which is for a public art project consisting of a surface design to be stamped into the pavement of a pedestrian plaza on Smallman Street. This project is part of the Department of Mobility and Infrastructure’s Smallman Street revitalization, and will be paid for from the Percent For Art from that project’s budget.

   Project artist Marlana Vassar goes over her design process and the initial conceptual designs for the project, influenced by the many cultures that have impacted the Strip District.

   Goulata asks about the two designs that were shown, and asks if they are both in development or if one is being pursued as a final design. Vassar says that she has created a few variations and these are just two of them. Goulata confirms that there is no final design yet. Vassar says that is correct, it is a work in progress that will be refined further over the coming months. Reese says no design has been selected yet but they wanted to include two variations today to get the initial feedback from the Commission.
Goulatia says she likes the second option as it will look more complete and cohesive as an embossed design. She says she is not sure where color would be incorporated in the design but the Commission would need to see how that looks.

Luckett says that she loves comments on Vassar’s research into Pittsburgh’s history, and says that she’d love to see Vassar incorporate indigenous people into the design as well. Goulatia agrees. Luckett says that she also appreciates the design motif that is similar to the stained glass of the nearby church. Vassar says that in her research she has seen similar patterns from many cultures and has incorporated them in different ways. She also says there is room to add visual motifs of indigenous peoples.

Arimoto-Mercer asks how color could be applied. Reese says they are exploring two options and have not made a determination on approach yet. He says there are very limited options for stains, but there are specialized paints and thermoplasts that have a wider variety of options. Arimoto-Mercer says it would be good to review those options as well as their lifespans, as they have seen projects that start out vibrant and deteriorate quickly. Reese says they are researching this.

Goulatia asks if this is going to be on asphalt. Reese says yes. Goulatia asks what materials will be next to it. Reese says there is a concrete curb around the circumference and the sidewalk is brick. Goulatia says it could be very effective without color since it is a complex design.

Lucas asks for confirmation that they are working with someone within DOMI, as they want to make sure the surface is safe and non-slippery, and that the tactile nature does not confuse those with accessibility issues. Reese says they are working with Eric Setzler at DOMI. Reese mentions the surface mural that OPA did at the airport, and says he was the project manager on that and learned a lot about the safety standards of asphalt covering.

Arimoto-Mercer asks if the asphalt is permeable or non-permeable. Reese says they have not talked about this and wasn’t aware of the different options. Lucas asks if the plaza is shared with vehicles. Reese says it is exclusively pedestrian. Arimoto-Mercer says it is worth looking into. Reese says he will ask his team.

Gable says that permeable asphalt has speed restrictions and so may not work on the street. Reese clarifies there will be no vehicle traffic on the plaza itself. Vassar points out the slide showing the border of the plaza. Goulatia asks what the border is made of. Reese says it is concrete. Vassar adds there are bollards included. Goulatia asks if the concrete border is raised. Reese says it is a raised 6-inch border and the bollards will be sunken into it. Luckett asks if there will be parking on the other side, and Reese says no. Luckett asks if there will be bikes ridden on top of the plaza, and asks if there will be bike racks. Reese says as far as he knows there will not be bike racks, but imagines bikes will be allowed on it. He says there is a possibility of tables being put out on the plaza by the business owners.

Goulatia asks what the measurements are for the plaza. Lucas says that she is sure they are working with Setzler on this, but to make sure that people can access this space who may not be able to step onto or off of curbs. Reese says there are ramp areas from 21st Street and from the sidewalk. Lucas discusses the diagrams shown and states that DOMI should be working with them on designing the access points.

Luckett asks if there is an alleyway between the buildings. Reese says yes, it is called Blevin Way but does not affect the design of the plaza. Reese says the building owner and the City are negotiating possible truck access to Blevin Way by removing the bollards, but he does not have details about that.

Luckett says it would be good to delineate where the bollards will be in the drawings. Goulatia adds they should see what the bollards look like. Goulatia asks if there are safety concerns with people tripping on the curb, or if the bollards prevent this by creating a fence. Reese says he will need to get back to them on this.
Gable says he is all for in support of storm water management. He says if this is a permeable surface, then it has maintenance concerns that are different than for non-permeable, so down the road they will need to have a discussion about who is performing maintenance. He says since it is possibly being painted he suspects that it is not able to be permeable.

[Parsakian was briefly having connection issues and dialed in by phone.] Parsakian says he likes the neighborhood involvement and has no other questions.

Arimoto-Mercer says it would be important to think about whether bikes will be allowed or only foot pedestrians, as that changes safety concerns. Reese says this has not come up yet, so he will clarify whether bikes would be allowed. Arimoto-Mercer says to think about all the ways people might be using the space and how it affects safety.

MOTION: Conceptual Approval, giving consideration to the suggestions of the Commissioners

MOVED BY: Arimoto-Mercer
SECONDED BY: Goulatia
IN FAVOR: All
OPPOSED: None

2. El Dragón – Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh Conceptual/Final Review

Zena Ruiz of the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh describes this project of a dragon sculpture by artist Linda Wallen to be placed outside of MuseumLab. The sculpture was made with help from members of the community and many of the tiles used on the mosaic sculpture came from the original building that were salvaged during renovations last year. The statue will be on a bed of concrete pavers with a landscaped sensory garden.

Goulatia asks if the sculpture will be alright to be exposed to the elements. Luckett also asks for background on the artist and her experience with public art projects.

Ruiz describes Wallen, who is a local artist with years of experience in exterior mosaics. She also describes the materials of the sculpture, which are made to withstand being outdoors. Goulatia asks if it is sealed. Ruiz says it is completely grouted and will be in sections until it is moved outside. She says there is a sealant which will last for five years, and there will be a schedule of assessment to happen every year.

Goulatia says she loves that they used materials from the building and says it looks very nice. She asks if the image shown is in proportion. Ruiz says it is pretty accurate. Goulatia says the organic formation of the pavers is the more interesting option. She says to make sure whatever plants are put there will be good for all seasons. Arimoto-Mercer says the plants will look better with the more organic paver footprint. She also says she likes the color scheme. She suggests that it would be good to have some evergreens for in winter.

Parsakian says that children will have a tendency to want to climb on this piece even with the plantings there. He says he loves the project and admires that they used materials from the project renovation.

Gable notes that DPW has provided a support letter for the project. He says that for an excavation they do they will have to do a One Call to avoid water lines, etc. Gable also says that DPW has experience working with Wallen, they love her work, and they look forward to this piece.

Minnnaert asks if the museum owns this piece or if it is being lent by the artist and notes that it is meant to be a longer-term installation but not a permanent one. Ruiz says it is owned by the museum.

MOTION: Conceptual/Final Approval
3. Townsend Park Public Art – Department of City Planning

Conceptual/Final Review

Cavalline presents the project, which is a public art piece to be installed on the retaining wall outside of Townsend Park. The park recently was renovated and the art piece is utilizing the Percent For Art from this improvement. The park design previously received Final Approval from the Art Commission in June 2019.

Cavalline goes over the history of the project to date, including artist selection, community engagement, and design. He shows examples of artist James Simon’s previous work and proposed design for this mosaic.

Simon introduces himself for questions. He says the challenge of this project was that it is a very large wall and the project budget is rather small. He says that his goal was to include a lot of desired factors in one piece: an image that includes diversity, is brightly colored, is cool to look at, and is fun for him to make. He says the streetcar design ties to the past and provides a way to include the name of the park within the mosaic. He mentions that there will be elements of nature like flowers and birds, and that there is a dog included due to the neighborhood previously having been known for having a lot of dogs.

Goulatia says she feels it would be more complete if it addressed the whole wall. She asks if Simon thought of a design that had elements scattered over the whole space. Simon says that he wasn’t interested in that design as he felt it would dilute the impact. Goulatia says it just makes the rest of the wall look very bare. She asks if there would be any possibility for the City to extend the project to occupy the whole wall.

Cavalline says that’s a great idea and says there would be possible ways for this to be addressed in the future. He notes that Simon often likes to work with the community in the creation of the work, but this is not possible currently, so that could be an option for the future.

Goulatia confirms that this is outside of the park. Cavalline says yes. Goulatia asks if there is a space inside the park for the artwork. Cavalline says the inside of the park is brand new, so DPW received a lot of feedback that they wanted the retaining wall that faces outward into the street to be activated.

Goulatia asks how big the wall is. Cavalline says it is very big. Simon says the mosaic area alone is 23 feet. Luckett says that she visited the space and think that a multiphased approach could be a good idea. She says that she sees Goulatia’s point but that the design on the wall could be a good way of inviting people in to the park. She says that it is a very big wall. Cavalline notes that Simon is providing a large piece for the size of the project budget.

Goulatia says that the rest of the wall could even be painted so the entire thing looks fresh. Simon says the actual piece will make more sense on the wall than the rendering appears, and says it will be similar to having a welcome sign right in the middle of the wall. Goulatia agrees and says that especially if Simon uses a grout that is a similar color, it will look more cohesive with the wall.

Luckett says that she loves the character and emotion in Simon’s work. Arimoto-Mercer says that she agrees that a fresh coat of paint on the wall would be helpful. Simon says that rubbing a stain into the wall might be a better way since it would retain the old character of the wall. Goulatia and Arimoto-Mercer agree. Cavalline says they can find out from the City what the possibilities are and says there are a few possible routes to explore for a phased project. Arimoto-Mercer says that
people will love it and that will provide the momentum to go further. Cavalline says people in the neighborhood are very excited about it.

Parsakian says he loves the piece. He asks if the telephone pole will get in the way of looking at it directly. Simon says the mural is set just before the telephone pole so it isn’t in the way if you are looking head-on. He says he looked over the space a few times and it seemed to be the best spot. Parsakian asks what the vertical dimension of the piece is. Simon says the whole thing is about 4 ft tall by 24 ft long, although the wall changes height. Parsakian says he loves the idea of future additions because it does feel like it could use more, and this could be a great starting point. He also says it seems like it will be very impactful for the neighborhood.

**MOTION: Conceptual/Final Approval**

MOVED BY: Goulatia  
SECONDED BY: Arimoto-Mercer  
IN FAVOR: All  
OPPOSED: None

C. Correspondence

Minnaert notes that there were two items of mail that were shared with the Commissioners.

D. Public Comment

None.

E. Director & Staff Report

Minnaert gives an update on the assessment of the City’s art collection. She says they have a group of eight experts helping to research and give feedback on the inventory. She says the first phase is looking at the data that they have on each item and beginning to identify those pieces that require further investigation and conversation. She says the group will connect in mid-December to discuss the ongoing research.

Luckett reads a letter of resignation which will be effective December 31, 2020. [Arimoto-Mercer delivered a letter of resignation earlier that day via email.]

Dash thanks Luckett and Arimoto-Mercer for their service.

Luckett mentions that she’d like to thank Gable [who is retiring in January and had already left today’s hearing] and notes that he has been great to work with and she has learned a lot from him.

Dash mentions that a press release for the open call for vacant Commissioner seats has been sent to the Mayor’s office and they are waiting on a response to that.

Minnaert notes that the Commissioners have all done a great amount of work this year and made significant contributions.

Arimoto-Mercer says that the Commission is in good hands going forward with Moss, Goulatia, and Parsakian.

F. Adjournment

**MOTION: Adjourn**

MOVED BY: Arimoto-Mercer
SECONDED BY: Goulatia
IN FAVOR: All
OPPOSED: None

The meeting adjourned at 3:45 P.M.