



26-0062

Agenda Date: 5/13/2026

REPORT TO ARTS COMMISSION

SUBJECT

Review and Recommendation of Public Art for Plaza del Sol, Phase II

REPORT IN BRIEF

Subject to Council Policy 6.4.4 (Art in Public Places), Plaza del Sol, Phase II (830510) is required to include a public art component. This project phase has an allocation equal to 1% of the project budget (\$21,000), combined with additional funding from the Public Art Acquisition Fund (890170), resulting in a total public art budget of \$100,000.

This report provides information on the five conceptual design proposals under consideration for the new public art. The Arts Commission will review and rank each of the proposals, and the recommendation will be forwarded to the City Council for final approval on June 2, 2026. There is no staff recommendation for this project.

BACKGROUND

Originally built in 2004, Plaza del Sol is situated in downtown Sunnyvale along Evelyn Avenue, between South Frances Street and South Taaffe Street, with underground parking accessible from multiple stairways at the northwest, northeast, southwest, and southeast corners of the plaza. It sits within the area historically known as Sunnyvale Town Center - a district with deep roots in the city's commercial and civic identity.

Phase II is the second stage of the project and is designed to enhance the existing park through upgrades and amenities added to improve the user experience:

- Children's play area
- Spray misters
- Enhanced labyrinth
- Overhead lighting near retail shops
- Covered garage ramp
- Walls with seating and planters
- Wi-Fi throughout the park
- Public art

Subject to Council Policy 6.4.4 (Art in Public Places), the project must allocate 1% of construction costs to new public art. However, the 1% allocation of \$21,000 was determined by staff to be insufficient to support an impactful work of art for the City's downtown plaza. Staff proposed a budget modification of \$79,000 (RTC 24-0773) from the Public Art Acquisition Fund (890170) to increase the art budget to \$100,000 in total. Council approved the funding request on Oct. 15, 2024.

To determine the parameters for public art, the City formed an 11-member Public Art Review Committee consisting of art professionals, Sunnyvale residents and project staff. This committee is responsible for selecting the artwork's location and the five semi-final artists who will develop conceptual designs for consideration.

In December 2025, a request for qualifications (RFQ) was distributed to artists and arts organizations through public art websites, artist networks, and the City's website, inviting artists residing in California to apply for the opportunity (Attachment 2). The response to the RFQ was low, prompting staff to extend the deadline and open eligibility to artists residing in the western United States. These adjustments increased the number of qualified applications to 16.

The review committee juried the applications down to five artists/artist teams who were invited to develop detailed conceptual designs. The past works and conceptual designs of the five artists or artist teams are outlined in this report. The Arts Commission is being asked to review and rank the proposals in order of preference. The Commission's recommendation will be forwarded to the City Council for consideration and final approval on June 2, 2026.

Following City Council's approval, staff will work with the selected artist/artist team to finalize the design, engineering, fabrication, placement and lighting of the art, as well as the development of a community workshop to engage residents. Any substantial changes to the approved conceptual design will require additional Arts Commission review and City Council approval before proceeding.

The City Council is scheduled to consider this item on June 2, 2026.

EXISTING POLICY

Sunnyvale Municipal Code 19.52 - Art in Private Development

Sunnyvale Council Policy 6.4.4 - Art in Public Places

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

CEQA review was completed prior to awarding the construction contract for the Plaza del Sol, Phase II, and staff determined that the project was exempt under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the following CEQA exemptions: Class 1 (CEQA Guidelines Section 15301(d)), which applies to repairs, maintenance or minor alterations of existing facilities involving negligible or no expansion of existing use; Class 2 (CEQA Guidelines Section 15302), which applies to the replacement or reconstruction of existing structures involving negligible or no expansion of capacity; and Class 30 (CEQA Guidelines Section 15330) which applies to the removal of contaminated soils and water from the lower pond. Public Art was a required condition of the project, and the artwork proposed will not create any new environmental impacts.

DISCUSSION

Selected Locations

To determine what type and where public art should be installed, the City formed an 11-member Public Art Review Committee, consisting of art professionals, Sunnyvale residents and project staff. The committee considered four areas previously deemed appropriate for public art (Attachment 3):

- Seated Planter Boxes
- Railing over garage ramp
- Walls flanking garage entrance

- Overhead lighting/trellis structure

The committee selected the overhead lighting/trellis structure adjacent to the retail spaces as the preferred location for public art. This location has a planned trellis with string lighting, but the committee determined that having an artist redesign this feature would activate the space by providing a focal point and additional lighting for the plaza.

Proposal Considerations

The RFQ solicited artists with experience in large-scale lighting elements. It also outlined that the selected artist/artist team will be expected to align with the City's vision of inclusion and diversity, and to represent the City's brand essence: Bold, Sustainable Innovation. However, no themes were provided for this project, allowing the artists to focus on any element they chose to incorporate.

Community Workshops

The selected artist/artist team will be required to provide a community workshop to promote the new plaza and public art. Details for the workshop were not required as part of the conceptual design but will be finalized as part of the contract process.

Maintenance Requirements

Each of the proposed designs have been designed to be easily maintained/cleaned, and should be straightforward to repair if needed. Graffiti prevention and weather protection have also been considered.

Lighting Requirements

Since light is an integral part of the artwork, no additional spot lighting is planned. Additionally, the artists were asked to consider the proximity of residential apartments to the site and light pollution and dark sky requirements when developing their proposal.

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN PROPOSALS

Proposal #1 - Charles Gaden (Attachment 4). This design concept is a large-scale illuminated canopy consisting of a steel cable superstructure suspended over the selected location. It includes over 2,200 translucent, four-inch LED cubes installed at varying heights. The canopy will create an illusion of an undulating surface, with an overhead landscape that invites people to gather and look upward.

During the day, the cubes will form a soft, reflective cloud-like canopy. Their translucent surfaces will catch natural light, creating gentle shadows and reflections. At night, the installation transforms into a dynamic light environment, where each cube functions as an individual pixel capable of displaying billions of colors and complex patterns. Visitors can also influence the artwork through a simple QR interface, creating a shared, participatory experience.

Proposal #2 - Luminous Waveforms (Phil Spitler and Victoria Mara Heilweil) (Attachment 5).

This proposal is an overhead sculptural light installation inspired by organic curves and the artist's aesthetic of repeating, parametric forms.

The sculpture will be constructed from powder-coated steel or aluminum to create color and shadows during daylight hours, and the embedded LED light tubes will glow playfully at night, inviting visitors to explore and interact with the sculpture.

Proposal #3 - James Peterson (Attachment 6). This design creates a portal with an experiential focus, walk into, through, and around the sculpture. It will provide a destination, journey, and communal gathering space.

Titled "JOY," the sculpture is a large-scale sculpture created from rolled stainless steel, laser-cut aluminum, stainless steel sheeting, colored polycarbonate, and LED lights. It will be colorful, with a sense of undulation and movement, and programmable for individual experiences.

Proposal #4 - Mandy Palasik Studio (Attachment 7). This proposal, titled "Vector Field", conceptually merges agricultural lines and early digital/video-game grid aesthetics, nodding to Sunnyvale's history, Silicon Valley's identity, and Atari's heritage. The installation will be a luminous canopy of LED neon elements suspended by cables and steel support housed in the planters. The sculpture will visually hover over the plaza, creating shifting spatial experiences during the day and an atmospheric light field at night.

The lights will be programmed with a static white default and transitions to subtle color patterns. The design will bring visual interest to the ground plane, as cable shadows during the day and illuminated light patterns at night introduce movement to the space.

Proposal #5 - Studiofolia (James Dinh) (Attachment 8). This design, titled "Radiant Ripples," is based on two concepts that share the same premise: solar radiance (sun/light) and human presence as social energy (community). The artist sees both concepts as a single metaphor: originating from a single point and expanding outward into a field of shared influence.

The sculpture will take the form of overlapping concentric rings, mimicking continuous ripples. Daytime viewing will provide patterns and lines that shift on the ground throughout the day, while the perforated steel tubes will glow from within at night, creating a warm white glow overhead.

FISCAL IMPACT

The project budget for Plaza de Sol, Phase II (#830510) includes a 1% provision for public art of \$21,000 with an additional \$79,000 funded through the Public Art Acquisition Fund (890170), for a total art budget of \$100,000. Ongoing maintenance for this project will require an estimated \$500 to \$1,000 per year, depending on the selected design. Maintenance costs for this artwork can be covered through the Public Art Maintenance Fund (890180).

PUBLIC CONTACT

Public contact was made by posting the meeting agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board at City Hall. In addition, the agenda and this report are available at the City Hall reception desk located on the first floor of City Hall at 456 W. Olive Avenue (during normal business hours), and on the City's website.

RECOMMENDATION

There is no staff recommendation for this project.

Pursuant to the Art in Public Places procedures, the Arts Commission should rank the proposals and develop a recommendation to the City Council for consideration and final approval. The selected conceptual design will be further developed under staff oversight to meet the Art in Public Places

guidelines within the allocated budget.

LEVINE ACT

The Levine Act (Gov. Code Section 84308) prohibits city officials from participating in certain decisions regarding licenses, permits, and other entitlements for use if the official has received a campaign contribution of more than \$500 from a party, participant, or agent of a party or participant in the previous 12 months. The Levine Act is intended to prevent financial influence on decisions that affect specific, identifiable persons or participants. For more information see the Fair Political Practices Commission website: www.fppc.ca.gov/learn/pay-to-play-limits-and-prohibitions.html

An "X" in the checklist below indicates that the action being considered falls under a Levine Act category or exemption:

SUBJECT TO THE LEVINE ACT

- Land development entitlements
- Other permit, license, or entitlement for use
- Contract or franchise

EXEMPT FROM THE LEVINE ACT

- Competitively bid contract*
- Labor or personal employment contract
- Contract under \$50,000 or non-fiscal
- Contract between public agencies
- General policy and legislative actions

* "Competitively bid" means a contract that must be awarded to the lowest responsive and responsible bidder.

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ATTACHMENTS

1. Reserved for Report to Council
2. Call for Artists
3. Site Plan and Photographs of Current Site
4. Charles Gadeken Resume, Past Work and Design Proposal
5. Luminous Waveforms (Phil Spitler and Victoria Mara Heilweil) Resume, Past Work and Design Proposal
6. James Peterson Resume, Past Work and Design Proposal
7. Mandy Palasik Studio Resume, Past Work and Design Proposal
8. Studiofolia (James Dinh) Resume, Past Work and Design Proposal
9. Staff Presentation

