



City of Sunnyvale

Agenda Item

25-0403

Agenda Date: 6/18/2025

REPORT TO ARTS COMMISSION

SUBJECT

Review and Recommendation of Public Art for Corn Palace Park

REPORT IN BRIEF

Subject to Council Policy 6.4.4 (Art in Public Places), the Corn Palace Park project (# 834330) includes a 1% budget provision for public art (\$43,000). This report provides information on the three conceptual design proposals for a seating wall and seven conceptual design proposals for three free-standing backless benches. The Arts Commission will review and rank each set of proposals (three seating wall proposals and seven bench proposals). The Commission's recommendations will be forwarded to City Council on July 29, 2025, for consideration and final approval. There is no staff recommendation for this project.

BACKGROUND

The Corn Palace property (1142 Dhalia Court) was originally a 20 acre parcel of agricultural land located west of Lawrence Expressway. It was known for its working cornfield and fresh produce stand. In 2013, the western portion of the property was developed into single-family homes, while a 2 acre parcel of the land was approved for a public park at the southeast corner of Toyon Avenue and Lily Avenue, extending to Lawrence Expressway. This parcel was acquired by the City in March 2020, and construction of the park is scheduled to be completed in late June.

Park amenities include open lawn space, trees, toddler and youth play areas, pollinator garden, shade structure, picnic areas, and public art.

Subject to Council Policy 6.4.4 (Art in Public Places), the project will incorporate 1% of construction costs for public art, totaling \$43,000. In November 2024, a request for qualifications (RFQ) was distributed through public art websites, artist networks, and the City's website, inviting artists residing in California to apply for four locations: one plaza seating wall and three backless benches (Attachment 2). A total of 17 artists applied for the seating wall location, and 15 artists applied for the backless bench locations.

The city formed a seven-member Public Art Review Committee of neighborhood residents, local homeowners' association members, and project staff to help select the artists. The committee selected nine artists to develop detailed conceptual designs (three artists for the seating wall location and seven artists for the backless benches, with one of the nine artists being invited to create a proposal for both commissions).

This report provides information on 10 conceptual design proposals. The Arts Commission is being asked to review and rank the proposals in order of preferred designs. The Commission's recommendations will be forwarded to the City Council on July 29 for consideration and final approval.

Following City Council's approval, staff will work with the selected artists to finalize the design, engineering, fabrication/execution, and placement of the art. Any substantial changes to any of the approved conceptual designs will require additional Arts Commission review and City Council approval before proceeding.

EXISTING POLICY

Sunnyvale Council Policy 6.4.4 - Art in Public Places

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Master Plan for Public Art

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The City Council approved the Corn Palace Park project on December 5, 2023, and found that the project was exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15303 and/or CEQA Guidelines Section 15304, and 15168(c)(2) and Public Resources Code Section 20194(c).

DISCUSSION

Selected Locations

The project team included: the Superintendent of Recreation Services, architects, Department of Public Works staff, and public art staff. They identified four potential art locations (See Attachment 3, indicated by red circles on the map), three backless bench locations, and a long seating wall in the center plaza area.

Public art locations are usually decided by the Public Art Review Committee, but for this project, that was not necessary for the following reasons:

- The 1% public art requirement limited the types of public art the budget could support.
- The number of possible locations was limited because of the size and layout of the park.
- The expedited timeline for construction of the park limited the public art possibilities to art that could be installed after the park opening, as opposed to integrating it into the site.

Proposal Considerations

The RFQ outlined that the selected artists were expected to align with the City's vision of inclusion and diversity, and to represent the City's brand essence: Bold, Sustainable Innovation. Artists were also asked to consider the site's historical and agricultural significance while developing their conceptual designs.

Maintenance Requirements

Each artist has proposed artwork that is easy to maintain, clean, and straightforward to repair if needed. Graffiti prevention was also a consideration.

Lighting Requirements

There is no artwork lighting required for this project. The current scope of construction includes foot-candle lighting for security. No spot lighting is planned for the artwork since all of the proposals are low to the ground and will be lit through the ground-level ambient lighting.

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN PROPOSALS - Seating Wall

Proposal #1 - Annie Cappelli (Attachment 4). This design is made of 64 hand-painted, hand-carved Sgraffito Ceramic tiles. This is a process where one layer of hard "leather" clay is scratched or etched out to expose the colors of the previous layer before adding more colors and eventually firing. Each tile will be 1-foot by 1.5-foot and they will run along the 64-foot linear seating wall.

The design illustrates scenes of what may have taken place on this site before it became a park, the Corn Palace vegetable stand, or the land was occupied by indigenous peoples. Scenes include nature, native peoples, farming, agriculture, corn fields, futuristic windmills, wetland, and recreational activities.

Proposal #2 - Juan Lopez/New World Mosaics (Attachment 5). This design, titled *Water is Life*, draws inspiration from the agricultural legacy of the Corn Palace site and the park's organic, wavy seating wall. It celebrates the rhythm and diversity of natural waterways.

The artist will apply blue porcelain mosaic pieces and shimmering mirror pieces to resemble rippling water, and inlay brighter tiles to create images of butterflies, frogs, blades of grass, and poppies. The scene will span approximately 40 feet, broken into nine irregularly shaped sections that mimic the natural fragmentation of riverbanks and tidepools. Each mosaic section will be bordered with mosaic boulders and river rock, creating a

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transition between the negative spaces of the wall.

Proposal #3 - Elba Raquel (Attachment 6). This design is a band of handmade tiles that illustrates the spirit of the Francia brothers' agricultural legacy, and the vegetables grown on the property (sugar beets, corn, tomatoes, and bell peppers). The design will include a variety of colors, textures, and tile sizes to create interest.

The background tiles will be larger and rectangular and include pistachio-green bands reminiscent of the Corn Palace stand's original look. The fruit will be created through smaller, irregular, brightly colored tiles, and the sky tiles will be square and arranged in a radial pattern. The contrast of the various colors, shapes, and sizes of the tiles will create a rhythm and sense of movement. The large, vibrant fruits will be strategically dispersed and stand out against the more subtle background colors.

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN PROPOSALS - Backless Benches

Proposal #4 - Annie Cappelli (Attachment 7). This design includes creating a rectangular cement bench and covering the front panel of the bench with hand-carved Sgraffito Ceramic tiles. This is a process where one layer of hard "leather" clay is scratched or etched out to expose the colors of the previous layer before adding more colors and eventually firing.

Imagery will include a corn field, the Corn Palace fruit stand, a soaring black bird, mountains, and a colorful sky.

Proposal #5 - Zoe R. Caron (Attachment 8). This design is a stylized, painted cement bench. The imagery will highlight natural history and native species for the site before Sunnyvale's transformation into a western agricultural center, which is presented as a 'stroll through time' concept. The left outer side of the bench will showcase species such as cattail, *Dichelostemma* (blue dicks), *Atriplex* (saltbush), wild strawberry, and evergreen huckleberry, symbolizing the area's natural history and ecological heritage. The center panel will represent agricultural imagery of crops that were sold at the Corn Palace stand, such as corn, tomatoes, plums, grapes, and carrots. The right outer side reflects modern-day park themes and recreational activities. The bottom and inner sides of the bench will be painted with worms and soil, integral to growing food.

Proposal #6 - Faducci (Attachment 9). This design consists of a handmade concrete bench adorned with six hand-sculpted concrete dancing corn figures. Each character is brightly colored and whimsically dancing in celebration of the park's history and previous agricultural contributions.

Proposal #7 - Liz Hickok (Attachment 10). This design explores themes of resilience, transformation, and ecological harmony. Inspired by native wildflowers that thrive in difficult conditions and regenerate after disruption, like California Poppies blooming after wildfires. Native pollinators, flora, and fauna will be added to celebrate the connection and interdependence between plants and pollinators.

Through large-scale, distorted images of native wildflowers, the artwork evokes a sense of motion, energy, and surreal beauty, mirroring both the park's agricultural past and its evolving future as a space for community and renewal. The imagery will be developed through an algorithm to alter and distort photos. The distorted images will be printed on tiles and kiln-fired before applying them to the top and sides of the bench. The front and back of the bench will be covered in abstract, hand-cut ceramic tiles that reflect the sky, native foliage, and changing light conditions. The edges will be finished with iridescent, glow-in-the-dark tiles that shimmer by day and emit a magical blue glow by night.

Proposal #8 - Carrie Lederer (Attachment 11). From afar, this design is a tapestry of vibrant, cheerful colors and swirling patterns that create a surreal and energetic background, but up close, visitors will find a myriad of images to discover, some hidden and some obvious. Bright clusters of fruits, flowers, animals, and foliage connect back to the agricultural history of the site, while spaceships, stars, and constellations represent

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current and future connections to Silicon Valley.

The imagery will be transferred to a high-grade porcelain tile, kiln-fired for durability, and applied to a cement substrate (bench). The artist hopes her design will reflect the vital relationship between land, water, and sky, and remind the viewer how fragile the natural world can be.

Proposal #9 - Alexandra Muddle (Attachment 12). This design is a colorful, geometric design rendered in 12mm square glass mosaic tiles and grouted on a prefabricated cement bench. The exact design of the bench has not been finalized, but the design can be modified to fit any selected bench.

The design balances the history and origins of the park, along with the present, thriving community, and future generations. The various linear circles, arches, and lines represent the lines created within farming and agriculture. The bold changing colors reflect enterprising, lively, and diverse values.

Proposal #10 - Amber J. Smith (Attachment 13). This design consists of a large, corn on the cob shaped bench with a flat top for seating. One side of the bench will have a playful, animated face to welcome visitors, with details sprinkled throughout, such as a curious ladybug, pastel flowers, and a cleverly placed book titled *The Cobbit*.

The other side will include a representation of the Corn Palace fruit stand with anthropomorphized fruits and vegetables, such as a banana on roller skates, a cherry on a skateboard, a vegetable family (celery mother, carrot father and baby tomato), and a seven-piece vegetable band (cucumber on trumpet, squash on guitar, eggplant on tuba, onion on keyboard, strawberry on drums, leek on electric guitar and asparagus on harmonica).

The bench will be constructed from a pre-made metal frame with sculpted Styrofoam and covered with Paltiya, a cement-resin sculpting material. The final layer will be rendered in ceramic tiles to finish the corn kernels and face, while the Corn Palace mural will be portrayed in glass mosaics.

FISCAL IMPACT

The project budget for the Corn Palace Park (project #834330) includes a 1% provision for public art (\$43,000). Ongoing maintenance for this project will require an estimated \$100-\$500 per year, depending on which design is chosen. This cost will consist mainly of staff time to rinse the tile work and will be included in the FY 2026/27 Recommended Budget.

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 City Council for consideration and final approval. It should include a single design for the seating wall and three designs for the backless benches. Once approved by Council, the selected conceptual designs will be further developed with oversight from staff to meet the Art in Public Places guidelines within the allocated budget.

Prepared by: Kristin Dance, Recreation Services Management Analyst
Reviewed by: Trenton Hill, Recreation Services Manager
Reviewed by: Jesus Raygoza, Superintendent of Recreation Services

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Reviewed by: Michelle Perera, Director of Library and Recreation Services

Reviewed by: Matt Paulin, Director of Finance

Reviewed by: Chip Taylor, Director of Public Works

Reviewed by: Sarah Johnson-Rios, Assistant City Manager

Approved by: Tim Kirby, City Manager

ATTACHMENTS

1. Reserved for Report to Council
2. Call for Artists
3. Site Plan with Selected Art Locations
4. Capelli Resume, Past Work and Seating Wall Design Proposal
5. Lopez/New World Mosaics Resume, Past Work and Seating Wall Design Proposal
6. Elba Raquel Resume, Past Work and Seating Wall Design Proposal
7. Capelli Resume, Past Work and Bench Design Proposal
8. Caron Resume, Past Work and Bench Design Proposal
9. Faducci Resume, Past Work and Bench Design Proposal
10. Hickok Resume, Past Work and Design Proposal
11. Lederer Resume, Past Work and Bench Design Proposal
12. Muddle Resume, Past Work and Bench Design Proposal
13. Smith Resume, Past Work and Bench Design Proposal