



# City of Sunnyvale

## Agenda Item

23-0412

Agenda Date: 4/27/2023

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### REPORT TO ARTS COMMISSION

#### **SUBJECT**

Recommend City Council Approve 16 Design Proposals for The Great Box Cover-Up! (Utility Box Art Project-Phase 2)

#### **BACKGROUND**

On November 10, 2020, the City Council approved \$50,000 from the Public Art Fund to Implement a Utility Box Art Project (Attachment 2 - RTC No. 20-0944). The project stemmed from the public outreach process conducted for the Master Plan for Public Art. The community, Arts Commission and City Council expressed an interest in implementing a temporary, community-based art project, in particular a utility box project.

Phase 1 of the project was completed in Spring 2022 and included 12 signal boxes located within the downtown area.

This report provides information on Phase 2, including the 16 artists selected by the Artist Selection Committee and their conceptual designs. The Arts Commission is being asked to review and recommend the design proposals to City Council for final approval. The Commission's recommendation will be reviewed by City Council on June 6, 2023.

Staff also plans to recommend to the City Council that the Council authorizes the Arts Commission to approve the final conceptual designs for Phase 3 of the Great Box Cover-up. Staff is making this recommendation for administrative efficiency, considering the high number of artworks for this project and the small commission amount. Phase 3 will include high school collaborations and is scheduled for calendar year 2024.

#### **EXISTING POLICY**

Sunnyvale Municipal Code 19.52 - Art in Private Development  
Sunnyvale Council Policy 6.4.4 - Art in Public Places

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

Painting existing utility boxes does not require environmental review because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity may have a significant effect on the environment (California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3)), and it is not a project or a reasonably foreseeable indirect change to the environment (CEQA Guidelines Section 15378(a)).

#### **DISCUSSION**

##### **Project Description**

This project was designed to bring local artists and their artwork to the community, as well as convert

gray, non-descript, city-owned traffic signal boxes into attractive and engaging artwork. There will be 38 locations in total, with one to three signal boxes per location.

The Utility Box Art Project is being rolled out in multiple phases. The first phase included 12 signal boxes in the downtown area (Attachment 3 - Map of Downtown Locations). The second phase will include 16 boxes located throughout the City and a third phase with 10 boxes is planned for calendar year 2024 that will include high school collaborations.

**Utility Box Locations**

The utility boxes in Phase 2 are city-owned traffic signal boxes throughout Sunnyvale at the following locations:

Sunnyvale Saratoga Road @ Remington Drive	Mathilda Avenue @ Tennis Center
Fair Oaks Avenue @ Kifer Road	Homestead Road @ Bellville Way
Mathilda Avenue @ Innovation Way	Fremont Avenue @ Wright Avenue
Mathilda Avenue @ Maude Avenue	Lawrence Station Road @ Elko Drive
Mathilda Avenue @ Sunnyvale Avenue/Talisman	Fair Oaks Avenue @ Iris Avenue
Arques Avenue @ Oakmead Parkway	Remington Drive @ Bernardo Avenue
Wolfe Road @ Marion Way	Mathilda Avenue @ El Camino Real
Caribbean Drive @ Crossman Avenue	Iowa Avenue @ Taaffe Street

Each location has one to three boxes. The selected artists are required to paint the largest of the boxes, with the option of including additional city-owned boxes on site as an extension of their design. The project commission is \$1,000 per location, regardless of the number of boxes painted by the artist.

**Selection Process**

For this phase, staff are following the same approval process as Phase 1. Pursuant to the Art in Public Places process, a Request for Qualifications was distributed through public art websites, artist networks and the City’s website inviting artists who live in Santa Clara, San Mateo, Santa Cruz, San Francisco, Contra Costa and Alameda counties to apply for the commission (Attachment 4 - Call for Artists).

Concurrently, City staff invited 10 Sunnyvale community members to form the panel responsible for reviewing and selecting the artists. Five of the members invited accepted, including two City staff and three residents.

Committee members were asked to rank applicants based on creative style and past artistic experience relative, or equivalent, to that of a utility box project.

Through a voting process, the panel selected 16 artists and two alternates for the project. The City has compensated the 16 artists (\$500/location or 50% of total commission) and invited them to develop a detailed conceptual design proposal for approval.

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### Execution of Approved Designs

Following City Council's approval, staff will work with the artists to finalize their designs. Any major concept changes will be brought back to the Arts Commission and City Council for approval. The artists are expected to paint their designs between June 16 and August 6, 2023.

Each utility box must remain operable and Artists are required to use City approved paints, primers and finishes to ensure the art is durable and long-lasting. Pursuant to the Master Plan for Public Art, the utility box art project is considered "temporary art" and will not be accessioned into the City's Permanent Art Collection. The Request for Qualifications and artist contracts include language specifying that the art can be removed at the sole discretion of the City. It is the City's expectation that the art will remain in place for a minimum of five years, or until such time it is deemed necessary to paint over for any reason, including but not limited to: fading, graffiti, unforeseen damage or box replacement. The utility box art condition will be evaluated as part of the City's annual collection review. After five years, staff will conduct an assessment to determine whether the temporary Utility Box Art Project should continue.

### Design Proposals (Attachment 5 - Conceptual Designs and Past Work Examples):

Proposal #1 - Pablo Ruiz Arroyo: Mr. Arroyo will be painting a single box at the corner of Sunnyvale-Saratoga Road and Remington Drive. His design includes the vibrant colors of native flowers and showcases the native Brown Headed Cowbird, with a rider wearing a backpack full of houses on its back, to show the relationship between community and nature.

Proposal #2 - ArtCircle Studio: The students of ArtCircle Studio will be painting two boxes at the corner of Fair Oaks Avenue and Kifer Road. Their design has three components: an homage to the Ohlone Native Americans; bounding hills and mountains; and imagery representing the transition of Sunnyvale from a small agricultural town to the quaint, residential and commercial city of today.

Proposal #3 - Kristen Calderon: Ms. Calderon will be painting two boxes at the corner of Mathilda Avenue and Innovation Way. Her design will honor the aerospace and tech industries, featuring purple blue hills, green leaves of native fruit trees and orchards; a birds-eye view of Moffett Field with historic military planes and the USS Macon overhead; and a continuous background of blue skies with puffy white clouds.

Proposal #4 - Greg Cheung: Mr. Cheung will be painting a single box at Mathilda Avenue and Maude Avenue. His design consists of an aquarium housing fantail goldfish, which are considered symbols of perseverance, abundance, success and wealth in Chinese culture. The artist chose these qualities to represent Sunnyvale's diversity and position at the center of technology.

Proposal #5 - Jemal Diamond: Mr. Diamond will be painting three boxes at Mathilda Avenue and Sunnyvale Avenue at Talisman Drive. His design consists of playful, colorful figures on a bright yellow background displaying bold exaggerations of movement. They signify community and our active connection with technology, and the diverse people of Sunnyvale.

Proposal #6 - April Gee: Ms. Gee will be painting a single box at Arques Avenue and Oakmead Parkway. The design will include an original character, Harmonia the Wise, who represents technology in harmony with nature and wears a dress patterned from different, diverse cultures. Additional imagery represents aspects of our Earth that need to be protected and nurtured.

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Proposal #7 - Alexandra Muddle: Ms. Muddle will be painting two boxes at Wolfe Road and Marion Way. She has created a design that speaks to the innovation and creativity represented in Sunnyvale, depicting turning gears and a brain generating “fuel” necessary to produce great ideas. The “fuel” is shown as water that nourishes the plants, which are light bulb topped flowers.

Proposal #8 - Yen Nguyen: Ms. Nguyen will be painting a single box at Caribbean Drive and Crossman Avenue. Her design is inspired by the growth of high buildings and technology in Silicon Valley, and the possible loss of human scale, which she illustrates with two windows: one with an expressive human face, and the other with an emotionless robot face. Both windows are surrounded by hopeful blue skies and rainbows.

Proposal #9 - Linda Nystrom: Ms. Nystrom will be painting two boxes at Mathilda Avenue and Tennis Center. Her design, "Baylands on a Box," consists of shoreline birds enjoying a game of tennis on a “wetlands” surface with birds either watching or playfully stealing balls.

Proposal #10 - Jayashree Sadasivan: Ms. Sadasivan will be painting a single box at Homestead Road and Belleville Way. The main theme celebrates community through a whimsical style of painting with elements of the surrounding community including the Stevens Creek with fish and dragonflies; an active playground; a school; and homes with hearts on top.

Proposal #11 - Ria Sharma and Geeta Taneja: Ms. Sharma and Ms. Taneja will be painting a single box at Fremont Avenue and Wright Avenue. Their cubist design addresses the online world integral to high tech in Sunnyvale, by depicting a young woman entangled by a laptop while trying to experience the outside world, where white blossoms of native peach and apricot trees abound.

Proposal #12 - Katherina Spaeth: Ms. Spaeth will be painting two boxes at Lawrence Station Road and Elko Drive. The main motifs for her design are the increasingly endangered Monarch Butterfly, which she sees as a symbol of transformation and new beginnings, and original, playful characters named Patchy Monsters, who care for our world.

Proposal #13 - Stephanie Tsao: Ms. Tsao will be painting a single box at Fair Oaks Avenue and Iris Avenue. Her design features gold sun rays on a blue background, with colorful and vibrant local plants, fish, birds and animals.

Proposal #14 - John Vellequette: Mr. Vellequette will be painting two boxes at Remington Drive and Bernardo Avenue. His design is a stylized rendering of Sunnyvale sunsets, incorporating the sky’s vibrant colors, the moon, which often shares the sky with the descending sun, and a nod to Sunnyvale’s past through a blimp gracing the skies.

Proposal # 15 - Deirdre Weinberg: Ms. Weinberg will be painting a single box at Mathilda Avenue and El Camino Real. Her design is allegorical for the beauty and possibility that comes with taking chances to achieve innovation and diversity. It highlights a young person of color holding a geometrical prism that catches light, throwing colors in all directions.

Proposal #16 - Madeleine Yung: Ms. Yung will be painting a single box at Iowa Avenue and Taaffe Street. Her design depicts oversized peaches, pears and cherries stacked on top of each other. As viewers move around the box, the fruit becomes increasingly more pixelated, reflecting the area’s progress towards modernity and automation.

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### **Next Steps**

The City Council will consider the Arts Commission's recommendation on June 6, 2023. The conceptual designs approved by the City Council will be further developed with staff oversight to meet the Art in Public Places guidelines within the allocated budget. Any design proposals not approved by the Arts Commission or City Council will be further developed and brought back to the Arts Commission and City Council for a second review and approval. Similarly, if an artist decides to paint additional smaller boxes at their designated location, they will need staff authorization to ensure the box is owned by the City and must stay within the approved conceptual design or return for review and approval by City Council.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The project budget for all phases of the Utility Box Art Project is \$50,000. The funds will be expended from the Public Art Fund, with approximately \$17,000 in Phase 2 for artist fees and incidental costs. A total of \$12,500 was expended for Phase 1 of the project.

The boxes are considered temporary artworks and therefore are not scheduled for on-going maintenance. Should a minor repair be deemed necessary, that cost can be covered out of the Art in Public Places operating budget. If the repair is not considered minor, the City has retained the right to repaint the box to its original gray state.

### **PUBLIC CONTACT**

Public contact was made by posting the Arts Commission agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall, at the Sunnyvale Public Library, Senior Center, Community Center and in the Department of Public Safety Lobby. In addition, the agenda and report are available at the Office of the City Clerk and on the City's website.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

1. Recommend City Council Approve 16 Design Proposals for The Great Box Cover-Up! (Utility Box Art Project-Phase 2)
2. Recommend City Council Approve less than 16 Design Proposals for The Great Box Cover-Up! (Utility Box Art Project-Phase 2)

### **RECOMMENDATION**

There is no staff recommendation for this project.

Prepared by: Kristin Dance, Recreation Services Coordinator II  
Reviewed by: Trenton Hill, Recreation Services Manager  
Reviewed by: Damon Sparacino, Superintendent of Recreation Services  
Reviewed by: Michelle Perera, Director of Library and Recreation Services  
Reviewed by: Tim Kirby, Director of Finance  
Reviewed by: Chip Taylor, Director of Public Works  
Reviewed by: Teri Silva, Assistant City Manager  
Approved by: Kent Steffens, City Manager

### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Reserved for Report to Council
2. RTC No. 20-0944 (without attachments)

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3. Map of Phase 1 Downtown Locations
4. Call for Artists
5. Conceptual Designs and Past Work Examples