



City of Sunnyvale

Agenda Item-No Attachments (PDF)

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REPORT TO ARTS COMMISSION

SUBJECT

Approve Art in Private Development Project - Google/555 W. Java Dr., titled *Murmurs from Infinity*

BACKGROUND

Under the City's Art in Private Development Ordinance (Sunnyvale Municipal Code (SMC) Chapter 19.52), the Google project at 555 W. Java Dr. is required to provide public art. This project was permitted prior to the adoption of the Master Plan for Public Art in 2020 and therefore requires a minimum 1% of the project's construction valuation be allocated for art, which is equal to \$451,227.

This report provides information for the Arts Commission's review and approval of *Murmurs from Infinity*.

The procedure established for reviewing artwork is:

1. Review the artist's background, including their experience and ability to design, fabricate and install large-scale artwork; and
2. Review the proposed artwork to determine whether the nature and style of the artwork is appropriate to the site; and
3. Determine whether the proposed artwork is appropriate in scale for the overall development; and
4. Review the location of the proposed artwork for accessibility to the public.

The Arts Commission has final approval for Art in Private Development projects, and therefore, this art proposal will not be considered by City Council.

EXISTING POLICY

Sunnyvale Municipal Code Chapter 19.52 (Art in Private Development)

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

A project on the site for design of a new 6-story office building, a special use amenities building, and a parking structure was approved in 2011 and a mitigated negative declaration was prepared. In 2019, the City received an application for minor modifications to the previously approved project. CEQA review was completed and staff determined that the environmental conditions for the modified project had not changed significantly from 2011. A notice of determination for the modified project was filed in 2020. Consistent with SMC Chapter 19.52 (Art in Private Development), art was a required component of the project, and the original and modified project conditions of approval required the applicant to provide public art as approved by the Arts Commission.

DISCUSSION

Project Location: This 14.7-acre site is located in north Sunnyvale along Java Drive. It is bordered

on the west by Mathilda Avenue and on the north and east by Bordeaux Drive (Attachment 1). The area is mainly industrial, with TETRA Hotel and AC Hotel by Marriott located across Java Drive to the south. The VTA Light Rail also runs adjacent to the location via Java Drive.

Project Description: The site is within the Moffett Park Specific Plan and was part of Yahoo's development design in the 1990's. Yahoo received an entitlement for a new 315,000-square foot office building, 24,000-square foot amenities building and a 5-story parking structure. In 2019 Google acquired the project and made some slight modifications to increase open space and incorporate mass timber construction.

Artwork Location: Google has identified the corner of Java and Bordeaux Drives as the location for the artwork (Attachment 2). It provides clear view corridors for passing motorists and VTA passengers, as well as pedestrian visitors and Google employees. A new pedestrian pathway close to the artwork will be added to allow visitors and employees to access and interact with the art.

Selected Artist: The artist selected for this project is Catherine Widgery (Attachment 3). Ms. Widgery is a sculptor living in Medford, MA and her resume includes public art works installed throughout the United States (North Carolina, Texas, Washington, Iowa, District of Columbia, Colorado, Minnesota, Michigan, Oregon and Utah) and Canada (Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia). Locally, her work can be seen in Fremont at the Warm Springs BART Station.

More information on Catherine Widgery's work can be found at widgery.com.

Artwork Proposal: In designing the artwork for this site, the artist was inspired and motivated by three things:

- The natural beauty of the three existing Canary Island pine trees on site;
- "Google's intangible cloud of knowledge and information that is never static, but rather dynamically changing" at all times; the sum of many parts, none more important than the other, combined for a single purpose or outcome, and;
- A way to combine these two elements (technology and nature).

As the artist was searching for a sculptural form that spoke to these three inspirations, she was reminded of a murmuration of starlings; "A swirling synchronous movement of many birds, forming a (single) coherent, ephemeral whole." This revelation resulted in an abstract, multi-layered sculpture design, that resembles a cloud of movement reminiscent of a murmur, appearing to 'float' in and amongst the pine tree's canopy (although the sculpture will not be touching or adhered to the tree's trunk or branches).

The sculptural form will be made from steel-mesh panels with 3-inch square openings, and it will measure approximately 20-feet High by 54-feet long by 38-feet wide (Attachment 4). The form will hover above the viewer and the lowest point will float at 12 feet above ground.

There will be seven groupings of steel-mesh panels that make up the sculptural form and encircle the pine trees. Each grouping will measure approximately 8-feet tall by 8-feet deep by 10-feet wide and will consist of several smaller, flat, steel mesh panels layered and seemingly put together haphazardly. Each panel will also have a circular cut-out at the center and will be painted neon

green. The extracted center circles will be painted a bright blue and juxtaposed within the center hole of the flat green panel, where it will appear to hover within its previous space. The blue and green sculptural elements will be rotated and layered to create pockets of negative space and perceived depth. Additionally, the neon colors will cause the shapes to 'pop' against the muted colors of the surrounding tree limbs.

To create an additional sense of movement and sparkle, the flat planes of the sculpture form will be interspersed with smaller 2-inch square and 2-inch round, dichroic covered disks (Attachment 5). These tiny disks will be hinged to move with the wind, while the dichroic surface will reflect light causing them to shimmer against the dark tree canopy like a firefly.

The sculpture form will be suspended on steel cables attached to painted, steel tubes, connected in a circle. This ring will be hidden within the canopy and supported by four 6-inch painted, steel tubes secured to underground footings that will be located outside of the trees' root system.

Maintenance: *Murmurs from Infinity* will be fabricated from materials that require minimal maintenance. The cables and hooks that suspend the structure will be made of stainless-steel cable which is naturally rust resistance. The steel tubing used to support the cables will be protected with a polyurethan autobody paint that should only need touchup painting every 10 years. The dichroic coated polycarbonate disks are also naturally resistant to the elements.

The artist is recommending the following maintenance routine to insure longevity of the sculpture:

1. Check cable rigging annually and tighten as needed.
2. Review the painted surfaces for damage and repaint as needed, although repairs should only be necessary every 10+ years.
3. Check the connections for the polycarbonate disks annually.
4. Knock down pine needles with a leaf blower if needed (3-inch openings should allow the tree needles to fall through).

Lighting Plan: The developer is proposing dimmable lighting to be mounted on the support structure, aiming the light down and across the sculpture form, which is considered within the standards of dark sky lighting (Attachment 6). The lighting will also be programmed to turn off overnight to avoid unnecessary light pollution.

Art in Private Development projects are required to submit lighting plans (SMC Section 19.52.050) to ensure lighting is incorporated into the overall art proposal. Final review and approval of the lighting plan and light fixtures is overseen by the Community Development Department as part of the permitting and installation process. This process allows for adequate review to verify the art lighting is following the various specific and precise plans within the City and the applicable design guidelines and standards, including Bird Safe Guidelines, Dark Sky Requirements, and Downtown Streetscape Standard Specifications and Details.

Art Bond: The City has collected a security in the form of a bond to guarantee installation of the art. The bond will be held until completion of the public art requirement, consistent with SMC Chapter 19.52 (Art in Private Development). The requirement will be deemed complete when the following conditions are met:

1. Art installation
2. Plaque installation
3. Lighting installation

4. Covenant recording with the County of Santa Clara, requiring the property owner to keep and maintain the art
5. Verification of the 1% expenditure

FISCAL IMPACT

If the artwork is approved, the developer will be responsible for design, fabrication, installation costs (including lighting and identification plaque), and ongoing maintenance of the artwork. There is no fiscal impact on the City's operating budget other than incidental staff time to monitor the project, which is budgeted in the Art in Private Development Program.

The Developer is required to provide supporting documentation to substantiate the art expenditures and anticipates the artwork will be equal to or greater than the minimum 1% of the construction valuation requirement (\$451,227). If it is not, the Developer will be required to contribute the difference to the City's Public Art Fund.

PUBLIC CONTACT

Public contact was made by posting the Council meeting agenda on the City's official notice bulletin board at City Hall, at the Sunnyvale Public Library, and in the Department of Public Safety Lobby. In addition, the agenda and this report are available at the NOVA Workforce Services 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.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve Art in Private Development Project - Google/599 W. Java Dr., titled *Murmurs from Infinity* as proposed;
2. Do not approve the artwork as proposed

RECOMMENDATION

Alternative 1: Approve Art in Private Development Project - Google/599 W. Java Dr., titled *Murmurs from Infinity* as proposed

Staff concludes that the artwork is consistent with the criteria for Art in Private Development requirements, although there have been concerns regarding the age and condition of the three Canary Pine trees that are integral to the artist's design. As with any Art in Private Development project, if the artwork fails it must be repaired, and if it is irreparable, or the artwork is removed, SMC19.52 requires the property owner to replace the artwork with a piece of art that is equal or greater in value.

Prepared by: Kristin Dance, Recreation Services Coordinator II

Reviewed by: Trenton Hill, Recreation Services Manager

Reviewed by: Damon Sparacino, Superintendent of Recreation Services

Approved by: Michelle Perera, Director, Library and Recreation Services

ATTACHMENTS

1. Vicinity Map
2. Site Map with Artwork Location

3. Artist Resume and Past Works
4. Artist Renderings
5. Materials Sample
6. Lighting Plan