

Art energizes North Van's public spaces

District council hears pitch from Arts Office for more public arts

BY SAM SMITH, NORTH SHORE NEWS APRIL 7, 2013



Moving Up by Karen Kazmer can be found on the Spirit Trail next to Welch Street in the District of North Vancouver. Scan for more photos.

Photograph by: NEWS photo, Mike Wakefield

DISTRICT of North Vancouver council listened closely to a **March 25 presentation** explaining the functionality and purpose that public art serves in the community and how council might improve its policy on the topic.

The Arts Office director Ian Forsyth and public art co-ordinator Lori Phillips reported on public art pieces installed since the district started its public arts program in 1999, what significance public art holds to the community, and plans for the future.

"Public art has the power to energize our public spaces, arouse our thinking, and transform the places where we live, work and play into more engaging environments that invite interaction," Phillips said during her presentation.

Art also has the power to express a community's sense of place by interpreting the physical environment, celebrating local customs, or interpreting social or industrial history, Forsyth and Phillips reported.

Since the district integrated a public arts program in 1999 and 2000, 55 pieces of public art have been installed in and around the municipality valued at \$1.8 million.

Phillips and Forsyth said this was a big success and want to continue this trend in a few different ways.

"Looking forward, it is clear that the developer public art policy drafted over a decade ago needs some modification, especially in light of the district's new OCP and village and town centres," Phillips said.

She proposed promotion of the public arts program as well as payments of up to one per cent on anticipated construction costs up to \$15 million, with another 0.5 per cent up to \$500,000 after that.

The idea of providing more funding for the public arts sat well with council, with members agreeing with Forsyth and Phillips that public art done right captures the spirit of an area, making the experience of living or visiting certain places much more enjoyable.

Coun. Lisa Muri specifically mentioned Lower Lonsdale, saying she liked the developers sticking with the infrastructure look, which she felt was unique to that area.

"I'm totally in favour of it," Coun. Muri said of the presentation's suggestions. "I just want to have that flexibility."

Flexibility meaning the district would have choices in the funding as well as what kind of art pieces could be installed.

Coun. Mike Little suggested more artistic integration within existing infrastructure, such as bus stops or lamp posts.

"I think you can get to a saturation point where having feature pieces spread out throughout the community doesn't nearly benefit us as much as having fewer signature pieces and then just general beautification throughout those areas," Coun. Little said.

Council agreed more funding should be put into the public arts, but their enthusiasm was not met from one member of the public.

Corrie Kost said more money should be put into public areas like parks instead of art pieces.

"What can be more enduring than a park?" Kost asked council. "I feel threatened. I feel we're off track."

Kost asked council to take a closer look at public amenities before the arts.

However, Coun. Alan Nixon disagreed, stating the arts are lasting and just as much a part of the society as parkland, pointing to notable artistic landmarks such as the city of Rome and Mayan temples.

"I've come to appreciate that there are things in this world that would never, ever be in existence had they not been for government funding them," Coun. Nixon said. "The city of Rome is probably a primary example of things that continue to exist and inspire people today."

Council made no decisions in the workshop, but councillors accepted the information they received and agreed to revisit the subject of public art.

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