

PUBLIC ART COMMISSION MEETING

A regular meeting of the Public Art Commission took place on Wednesday, March 23, 2011, at 5:30 P.M. at the Cambridge Arts Council.

The following members were present:

TK McClintock
Julie Graham
Mags Harries
Stephanie Boye
Cynthia Smith
Miriam Stewart

The following member was absent:

Brent Ryan

Staff present:

Lillian Hsu, Director of Public Art
Rika Smith McNally, Conservator

1) Matthew Mazzotta presentation

Matthew Mazzotta presented his proposal for Western Avenue a second time to the PAC. Matthew showed the image indicating his concept for a large rectangular table, stationary chairs, and chandeliers installed on a brick platform approximately two feet above street grade at Cronin Park. When he presented in February the PAC had helpful comments on the design. He has been in numerous meetings with City staff from various departments as well as with Cynthia Smith, landscape designer on the project. Many details of the park design have been discussed toward a common goal of integrating the artwork with the park such that both are well served by the overall design. Lillian passed around copies of the updated plan for Cronin Park.

Matthew showed a model of the chair as he would like it to be fabricated – the seat to be made of ipe wood and all other parts made of sheet metal. He showed an image from an outdoor furniture website showing a tabletop made of ipe, indicating the type of construction using parallel boards with narrow spaces between them for drainage. Matthew said the designer for the table will be different than the chair designer. He has been working with someone at MIT for the chair. Matthew would like the table to visually “disappear”, i.e. be simple in shape and material. Cynthia mentioned that she had quotes for the long wooden bench that will be located opposite the steps leading up to Matthew’s table. Cynthia said the fabricator of the long bench, which will be a custom item, could fabricate for Matthew’s piece if Matthew is interested. Rika also mentioned a wood fabricator she would recommend.

Matthew showed a slide of a curved brick path laid in a grassy slope to illustrate what he would like to see for the path at Cronin.

Julie said she thought the table looked thick. Matthew said he intended the tabletop to be 3" thick, with an invisible structure underneath – four posts at the corners and two middle ones holding the chandeliers. Matthew said he wanted the structural design to preclude a collapse from weight being applied around the perimeter of the table (e.g. someone standing on top). Perhaps a T-shaped support would work. TK asked if 2.5-3" thickness was necessary and might it be costly? Matthew said he was aiming for a substantial look. With the large size of the table (approx. 4x18') this thickness may not appear very thick.

Cynthia confirmed that the contractor will install the table and chairs, and the slab and footing will be covered by the construction budget.

According to the current design, there will be three chandeliers. Matthew recently spoke with a Utica chandelier fabricator. He showed several images of existing chandeliers that have inspired him, e.g. the Hagia Sophia.

There was agreement among PAC members that the three components of Matthew's design do not go together visually, and they encouraged Matthew to make them relate more closely. They offered thoughts on how to think about the overall aesthetic. The image Matthew showed is composed of silhouettes and gives the whole appearance a unity. Miriam said the over-sized table gives a "Mad Hatter" effect, but she understood that Matthew was aiming for an intimate space. Mags said the real challenge is the chandeliers and that perhaps Matthew should start with them, deciding whether it will be made out of sheet steel or cast elements and what the style would be, and then develop the design for the table and chairs from the vocabulary of the chandeliers.

There were comments about Matthew's goal of having a "baroque" style. The current design is not really baroque in the strict sense. Matthew wanted a "ubiquitous regal style". TK warned against the aesthetic looking corny or dated and suggested that in driving by the park one may see the chandelier more than the chairs.

Julie said she was surprised that Matthew wanted the table to disappear. With the current design the table looks modern while the chairs are meant to be "baroque". Matthew responded that he was not sure how to accomplish the design of the table and thought it would be best if it did not draw attention to itself. Everyone agreed that Matthew should work on getting clarity of materials and design and make a partial model. There was continued support for the concept, but material, coherence, and visual language need to be rounded out. Cynthia informed the group that construction documents will be done by July, with sewer work in the fall and surface improvements

1.5 years after that, ending in late 2012. Cynthia also mentioned there will be water at the park in the form of a spigot, good for Matthew's concept and for Rika's conservation/maintenance use.

Matthew thanked the Commission for all feedback and said he would work on design integration and clarity.

2) Laura Baring-Gould presentation

Laura presented her progress for the Northeast Sector project since fall 2010, including meetings with the Site Committee members and City staff, identification of possible sites, development of basin and bench concepts and presenting models and sites to the Site Committee. Laura had come to a decision to design a bench with a bronze cast of the watershed, presented in linear form to conform to the back of the bench. At the last meeting with the Site Committee there were some objections to the bench and a perceived conflict between educational and reflective experiences. There was a strong desire to adhere to the Fresh Pond Master Plan and its stated goal of having nothing built in the "natural" areas and minimal seating. Some members of the Site Committee feel there should be more seating. There was a desire for Laura to place her artwork in the area of Maher Park. One member of the Fresh Pond Advisory Board, Louise Weed, had to leave the meeting early. Towards the end of the meeting the group tentatively agreed to consider the corner of Lusitania meadow where there is now a cluster of angular sitting rocks. Laura considers this site unsatisfactory because there are already two bodies of water on either side and no further need to bring people's attention to the water and in summer months the exposure means the sun will evaporate the water in her basin rapidly.

Laura discussed the factors to consider at Maher Field – the existing use as a soccer field; the various structures such as fences, benches, lighting, signs; seasonal activity. Laura expressed frustration with the process to date and outlined what she saw as four options going forward:

1. Create small Fresh Pond basins in bronze for one or both of the drinking fountains in Maher Field – the bronze cast replacing the existing steel bowl of the fountain.
2. Create a festival event. Laura mentioned other examples such as the Jamaica Pond Lantern Day and the Providence Waterfire event. She would coordinate the events with the schools, perhaps over the course of 2 years. Laura asked if this was an acceptable option for CAC.
3. Find a less controversial site for the artwork on the Fresh Pond Reservation, not in the Northeast Sector.
4. Find another artist.

Cynthia mentioned the theft of drinking fountain bowls in the city last year. Lillian confirmed that the Percent-for-Art Ordinance allows for temporary work as well as

permanent. Laura mentioned that she has done work in the past with schools and watershed educators around Massachusetts. Mags mentioned that the Cambridge second graders have a water theme in their curriculum.

The Commission discussed the benefits of a temporary project and whether such a project would speak to Laura's artistic work. Some felt the bronze bowls in the water fountains could open Laura's proposal up to another process similar to what has already happened with the FP Advisory Board. The Commission encouraged Laura to pursue the idea of a temporary project that celebrated the water. The motion was made and seconded. Mags stated that the PAC should write a letter to the FP Advisory Board.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.