City of Palo Alto Staff Report to Public Art Commission

April 16, 2018

RE: Agenda Item 2

Recommendation:
Staff recommends that the Public Art Commission amend contract C17167868 with artist Mary Lucking to approve additional funding in the amount of $10,000 to fund the artist designed railing for the upcoming Highway 101 bike and pedestrian bridge.

Background:
The Highway 101 Pedestrian Overpass Project at Adobe Creek will replace an existing underpass that is available only half the year (on average) due to seasonal flooding. It would also complement an existing, although Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) deficient, overpass that is 1.25 miles north. The new overcrossing will also include a 0.13 mile Class I trail connection along an existing Santa Clara Valley Water District maintenance road.

In the heart of Silicon Valley, Palo Alto (along with its neighbor to the south, Mountain View) is home to hundreds of technology and research-based companies, including a number of major employers such as Google, Intuit, and Space Systems Loral that have clustered in close proximity to Highway 101 and the Bay Trail. To better link these growing job centers with regional trails and bicycle facilities, and improve access to superb recreation opportunities like the Baylands, Palo Alto has prioritized the funding and construction of a new, year-round bicycle and pedestrian overcrossing over Highway 101 at Adobe Creek near the City’s southern border.

Bridge Project Status
The Bridge design submissions received during the design competition were not selected due to budget constraints. The City sought design teams through a Request for Proposal process resulting in a design team selection by Council in May 2016. The design team, Biggs Cardosa and Associates (BCA) developed a 15% design for Council consideration in early November 2016. Council accepted a bird-friendly Bowstring Bridge Concept design presented by BCA for a 12-foot wide bridge to meet the $14 million project budget.
The Artist Selection Process:

Staff pulled artists from the prequalified pool who have experience in transportation projects for consideration for this commission. Of the 61 artists with transportation experience, a pre-panel of staff brought the number down to 23 to be considered by a selection panel.

The selection panel was made up of:

Claudia Guadagne – FMG Architects
Judith Wasserman – Served on original Bike Bridge Panel, former ARB and PAC member
Mila Zelkha – Public Art Commissioner
Mel Day – Artist, Cubberley Artist Studio Program
Selene Foster – Palo Alto Art Center Curator
Jerry Hearn – Environmental Advocate
Lee Lippert – Cyclist, former ARB member

The selection panel chose five artists to give presentations about their previous work and their development process. One of those finalists dropped out of the project, and the remaining four made presentations to the panel January 25, 2017. Panelists were asked to score the artists in three categories: 1- artistic excellence and strength of their previous body of work 2- Suitability to the bridge project based on previous work 3- Artist’s approach to the concept development and process. After the interviews, the panelists scored the artists, and Mary Lucking was the highest ranked artist.

Mary Lucking was approved by the Public Art Commission as the project artist in February 2017. Lucking’s contract was approved by City Council March 27th, 2017. The artist traveled to Palo Alto in April 2017 to meet with the design team, tour the area in which the bridge will be sited, and gathered as much information about the project as possible.

Due to the scale of the project and the limited art budget, the opportunities for public art integration are somewhat limited. While Mary was here, we explored numerous opportunities for art integration into the bridge, including the trail split at the western approach to the bridge, the railing at various places on the bridge, the scenic overlook, and the roundabout at the eastern approach to the bridge. While the design team really wanted to have the artwork integrated throughout the structure, the limited budget, strong industrial truss design, and stringent safety regulations associated with the project made the smaller elements get lost in the larger project and the team felt they would not be as impactful. The artist proposed concentrating her artwork at the scenic overlook, creating an environment for reflection on the beautiful Baylands that can be viewed from that space. This is the only space along the bridge where visitors can step away from bike and pedestrian traffic.
Discussion:

The Conceptual design was reviewed and approved by the Public Art Commission on August 14, 2017. Inspired by the wetlands and the many creatures that live below, Lucking proposed creating sculptures for the overlook that can double as creative seating. More traditional benches, interpretive signage, and bike racks will be available nearby. The cast aluminum pieces will have a brushed finish and sculpted texture that will make them visually engaging and interesting to touch. The pieces currently planned will range in scale from 32” x 32” x 36” to 32” x 24” x 18”, but may have to scale slightly up or down as the bridge design is finalized and we must leave enough clearance for ADA regulations. The three pieces can be cast and installed and still leave some funding available to put toward an artist designed railing at the overlook area, but not enough to fully fund the railing.

At the time that PAC approved Mary Lucking’s design for the seating elements and railing, the commission expressed strong support for the artist designed railing and inquired if additional funding could be allocated for this purpose. Staff informed the PAC that since we do not have enough information yet to determine the additional cost, that staff would return to the PAC once we have determined the amount of additional funding necessary and make the request.

Because the Bike Bridge is in a marine environment, a very corrosive-resistant alloy is necessary for the artist-designed railing panels. After consultation with multiple fabricators, artists, and public art project managers experienced with commissioned sculptures in similar environments, it was determined that 316L stainless steel was the most appropriate alloy for Mary Lucking’s bridge railing design. This material is costly, but would provide the durable corrosion resistance needed for this location. There is $10,000 set aside for contingency in the contract. The cost for this stainless steel material is $11,920. Staff requests that the PAC approve a contract amendment to contract C17167868 to add $10,000 to the Bike Bridge public art project to cover this expense and still leave a little bit of contingency funding in place.

Timeline:

The contract amendment will have to go to Council for final approval. The bridge project is currently under review by various review bodies and staff hopes that project construction will begin early 2019 and is scheduled to be completed in 2020 pending permitting and available funding.

**Attachment A:** Concept renderings of the railing and cast seating element placement.
The project consists of two elements: sculptural seating and a cut patterned railing.
Cast aluminum sculptural seating

Each piece has a different soft, biomorphic form, and is textured to echo the variety of natural textures found in the baylands: native grasses, sand, water ripples, pebbles.

*Renderings are conceptual and may change as the project proposal evolves*
The art railing surrounding the seating area will set it apart, reinforcing the feeling of being in nature, scaled down, among the grasses and stones.

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