



CITY OF
**PALO
ALTO**

City of Palo Alto Staff Report to Public Art Commission

Meeting Date: January 18, 2024

RE: Agenda Item 1

Recommendation

Staff recommends that Public Art Commission approve the conceptual design of the artwork by Stephen Galloway for Fire Station 4.

Background

The City of Palo Alto Public Art Program operates in accordance with Chapter 2.26 Visual Art in Public Places Policy of Palo Alto Municipal Code. The [Municipal Percent for Art Policy](#) specifies that the City will budget one percent (1%) of its construction costs to include public art for City capital improvement projects that have a visual impact on the surrounding environment by altering a site through new construction or reconstruction, at the initial stages of design, thereby ensuring that art elements become an integral part of the overall design.

In 2015, in order to strengthen its ongoing commitment to the City's municipal public art program, the Palo Alto City Council amended the Palo Alto Municipal Code to add Section 2.26.070 "[Public Art for Municipal Projects](#)" to Chapter 2.26 (Visual Art in Public Places). The Ordinance enhanced the funds available for public art and increased flexibility to provide art experiences that are timely and relevant throughout the community. According to the Ordinance, one percent (1%) of the City's annual Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget devoted to public art is deposited into the Public Art Fund. Funds may be used at any appropriate site within Palo Alto for permanent or temporary public art projects. Additionally, funds from two or more CIP projects may be pooled to fund a single work of art.

Discussion

Fire Station 4, located at 3600 Middlefield Road, is a CIP project that has funds earmarked for public art in accordance with the [Municipal Percent for Art Policy](#) and Municipal Code [2.26.070](#) (Visual Art in Public Places). BRW Architects are the architects for the project and have met with Public Art staff regarding the incorporation of artwork into the project design. Public Art staff presented opportunities for public art integration into Fire Station 4 to the Public Art

Commission (PAC) on October 20, 2022. The PAC was supportive of the opportunities and integration of art and approved funds in the amount of \$100,000 plus a ten percent contingency for the project.

After the PAC approved funds for the project, staff initial conversations with the architect, Public Works, and Fire to determine opportunities for art integration. Public Art staff reached out to thirty-one artists appropriate for the commission from the prequalified artist roster who may be interested in creating architecturally integrated artwork. A selection panel of seven stakeholders, including Stephen Lindsey – Deputy Chief, Palo Alto Fire Department, Julia Lee – Media Art Teacher/PALS Leadership Adviser, JL Stanford Middle School, Sang-ah Choi – Artist, Cubberley Artist Studio Program, Lisa Waltuch – Public Art Commissioner, Charlotta Hauksdottir - Artist, Cubberley Artist Studio Program / Community Member, Valerie Tam - Project Engineer, Dept. of Public Works, City of Palo Alto and Megan Zhang – Assoc. AIA, BRW Architects evaluated twenty artists and selected Stephen Galloway for the commission. Galloway was selected for his demonstrated use of various materials, his polished and graceful aesthetic, his use of nature imagery, and the team felt overall that he would be a good match for the building. The selection panel's recommendation of Stephen Galloway was approved by the PAC on March 16, 2023. Upon approval by the Public Art Commission, Galloway entered into a contract for the design and fabrication of the artwork.

Galloway traveled to Palo Alto in May 2023 to meet with the design team and initiate his research and design development process for the project. The artist visited the existing Fire Station 4 and Mitchell Park, and walked the neighborhood. Staff attended the MSC open house event July 15, 2023, and solicited feedback from the public about the fire station and surrounding neighborhoods. An in-person meeting was held at the Mitchell Park Library on July 19th, 2023, for the artist to introduce himself to the community, and gain feedback. Staff and the artist met with Fire Department personnel at Fire Station 4 to learn about their roles and relationship with the community on August 25, 2023.

The artist has been working with staff on concepts over the past few months, and met with representatives of Public Works, the Fire Dept., and BRW Architects to get their agreement with this concept. Informed by his research of the area and community and stakeholder engagement, Galloway proposed a two-dimensional artwork that pays homage to the resilience symbolized by a compelling Palo Alto oak tree, blending seamlessly with the station's architectural design, integrated into the façade of the new building and spanning two adjacent walls facing Middlefield and East Meadow. The proposed artwork will have a distinct day and night presence (Attachment A).

Timeline, Resource Impact, and Policy Implications

The funds in the amount of \$100,00 for the contract come from the pooled art funds in the Art in Public Spaces CIP (AC-86017). The Public Art for Municipal Projects Ordinance (Ordinance Number 5301, Municipal Code 2.26.070) requires that 1% of the CIP budget for municipal projects is allocated for the commission of public art. The estimated timeline for sculpture installation is Winter 2025/2026.

Proposal

Commonweal, a public artwork

Firestation #4, Palo Alto, CA

Artist: Stephen Galloway

Introduction: We propose the creation of "Commonweal," a public artwork to be installed on the exterior façade of Firestation #4 in Palo Alto, CA. Artist Stephen Galloway will craft a two-dimensional integrated artwork that pays homage to the resilience symbolized by a compelling oak tree, blending seamlessly with the station's architectural design.

Artwork Description: Spanning two adjacent walls facing Middlefield and East Meadow, "Commonweal" comprises 18 steel panels, each measuring 6 feet in height and 1 foot in width. The panels, designed to mimic dimension of wood-grained cladding elsewhere in the building, depict a stylized oak tree sourced from photographs of a majestic specimen at the Pearson-Arastradero Preserve in Palo Alto. The artwork will have distinct day and night presence.

Inspiration and Rationale:

- First inspiration: The central role that the Fire Station plays in community well being, identity and cohesion. The oak is a symbol of health, strength and resilience. The artwork, placed at the main public interface with the building, helps create a positive, strong tone to the Station.
- Second inspiration: The context of Palo Alto, Mitchell Park. Palo Alto is a city of trees, even being named after one. This includes a healthy selection of native coast live oaks and valley oaks through the city. Incorporating the tree motif in the Station's artwork emphasizes connection with the local park and neighborhood and Palo Alto as a whole.
- Third inspiration: The Station's architecture. While creating a functional service building, the designers have worked to have the building reflect the architectural heritage of the neighborhoods. The artwork design works in concert with the planar qualities, the strong vertical and horizontal lines, the massing and the cladding of the Station. It is meant to integrate with the building's design.
- Fourth inspiration: The beacon. The Station's and the firefighters' roles need to remain in the community's consciousness. The artwork's design serves to engage the community visually, marking the building. Citizens are drawn down East Meadow and then around the corner along Middlefield as they complete the image of the tree in their minds. More

importantly, the work, lit as planned, can act as a heartwarming beacon at night. With a soft wash of light across the front and a warm glow emanating from the rear, the artwork beacons gently in the night. The feeling this gives is parallel to the sense I got when I saw the safe haven sign by the Station's front door. This is a place of care and protection, approachable day or night.

Fabrication: The artwork will consist of 18 enamel-coated steel panels, varying in height and width. Mounted with a 6-inch separation between panels, they will be positioned 1 inch proud of the wall to allow light from rear-mounted LED strips to spill out. Fabricated with a ¾ - 1" return finished in white enamel, the panels will be attached to angle iron brackets, ensuring stability and anchorage.

Lighting: During daylight hours, these colorful, opaque panels will be clearly visible to passer-by. At night, a combination of backlighting with a gentle front lighting will produce luminous glow while also allowing the image to appear clear and distinct. The front lighting will be from overhead units originating in the building's eaves. The rear lighting that spills from behind the panels is created by weatherproof LED striplights installed between the panels and the exterior wall.

Installation: Detailed engineering and planning will determine the wall construction, lighting design, and landscaping necessary for installation. The panels will be attached to angle iron brackets along the top and bottom edges, with additional elements including exterior-grade LED lighting for rear illumination and soft, dim front flood lighting.

Maintenance: Constructed of durable enamel on steel, the artwork is easy to maintain and color-fast for decades. Regular hosing will remove debris, while occasional cleaning with a gentle detergent and soft rags will ensure its longevity.

Next Steps: Collaborative efforts with the project design team will address various aspects of design, engineering, and planning. Key areas include wall construction, lighting design, landscaping, and protocols for installation. The goal is to seamlessly integrate "Commonweal" into Firestation #4, creating a timeless and visually engaging symbol for the community, day and night.

Current Team:

City of Palo Alto Department of Public Works
Stephen Galloway Studio
BRW Architecture
Hohbach-Lewin Inc
Cal Lighting



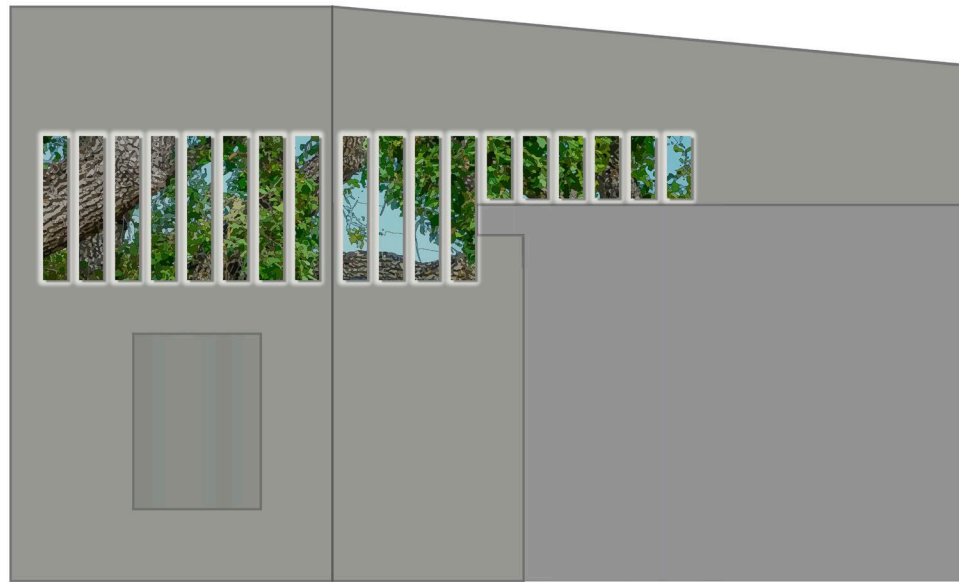
Rendering of Firestation 4 with proposed artwork



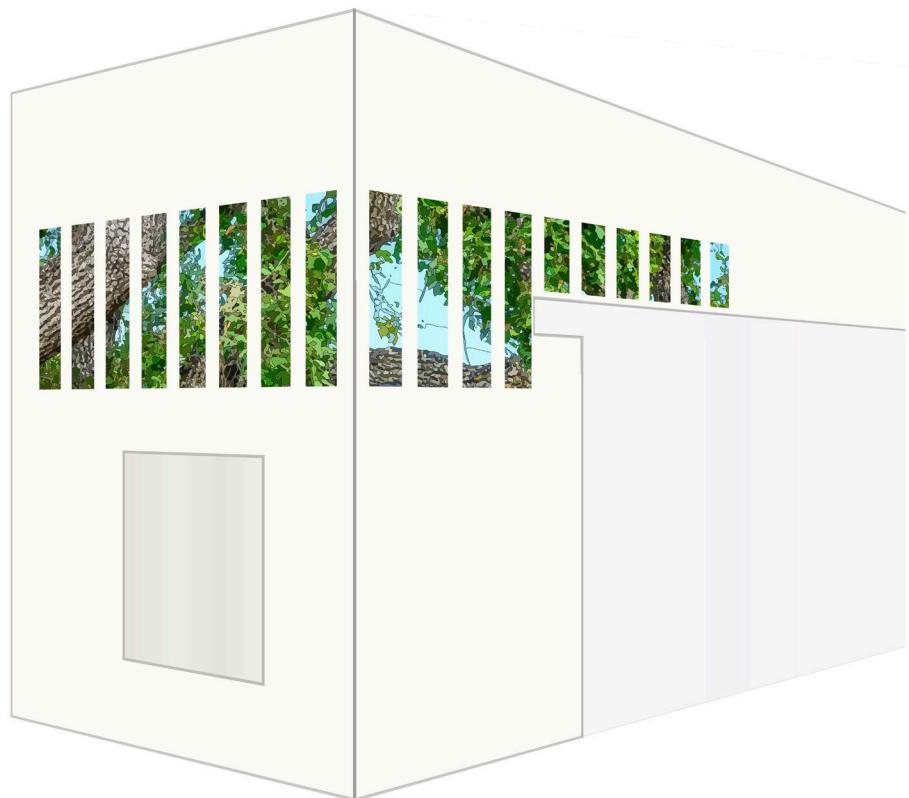
Overall Design Layout



Design Layout, 2 adjacent walls



Design Layout, night view



Design Layout, 2 adjacent walls, in perspective