City of Palo Alto Staff Report to Public Art Commission

October 20, 2016
Item 2 – Code:ART

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends the approval of funds up to $25,000 to support the NEA Art Works grant supported initiative to temporarily re-imagine the downtown alleys and underutilized spaces with nine installations.

BACKGROUND: Throughout the outreach efforts for the Public Art Master Plan, the alleyways of downtown were mentioned frequently by residents, business representatives, and commuters as needing to be addressed. Additionally, there was input from commuters and residents expressing feelings of isolation from one another. In July of 2015, Public Art Program staff applied for a National Endowment for the Arts Art Works grant to address these issues by appealing to the "brain trust" associated with Palo Alto to activate the downtown corridor and explore the possibilities for animating these shared spaces. The grant application to support the Code:ART initiative was recommended for funding, and staff has been diligently working to see the project come to fruition in June 2017.

DISCUSSION:

Code:ART and National Day of Civic Hacking

Mission: Code:ART will temporarily reframe the City as a laboratory for urban interventions and creative placemaking while engaging commuters, residents, students and visitors in dialogue to shape the future of the downtown corridor.

With the support of an Art Works grant through the National Endowment for the Arts, the City of Palo Alto Public Art Program in partnership with the Information Technology Department will launch a new media festival, Code:ART June 1-3, 2017, which will engage the community in an event that outwardly reflects the sometimes reclusive tech community that thrives here. The event will coincide with the National Day of Civic Hacking, which will take place on Saturday, June 3rd 2017, and engage the broader tech community in re-imagining the future of downtown Palo Alto.

The cost of living is prohibitive for many who work here. As a result, thousands of employees commute to Palo Alto daily – often leaving without engaging with other members of the

community. The epicenter of Silicon Valley, Palo Alto's population of 65,000 more than doubles each day with tech commuters and Stanford University affiliates.

The often secretive nature of the work taking place within these companies has resulted in privacy fogged windows throughout the downtown corridor – diminishing the pedestrian experience, limiting interaction between the residential community and tech employees, and leaving the downtown corridor void of any visual evidence of the creative activities taking place. Code:ART will temporarily reframe the City as a laboratory for urban interventions and creative placemaking while engaging commuters, residents, students and visitors in dialogue to shape the future of the downtown corridor.

Artwork: A major temporary public art project will be commissioned in a key downtown site, anchoring the three-day festival and acting as a major draw to the downtown corridor. This installation will be of the highest quality, submitted through a call to experienced public artists, selected through a panel of arts professionals. The artwork may be a projection, physical sculpture with an interactive component, sound or light based artwork.

Urban Interventions: Eight urban intervention installations will be installed in the downtown corridor, reimagining downtown spaces and exploring potential new uses of some of the sites. These interventions or prototypes may be augmented reality, virtual reality, street furniture, projections, or any other type of intervention that activates or alters some of the downtown storefronts, alleys, parking lots, blank walls in new and inventive ways. Intervention team members, "Geeks on the Street" will be on hand during the festival to discuss their piece and engage the public in conversation. There will be temporary signage at each installation site with basic information about the intervention, the creator(s), and offering a way for the public to give feedback. Palo Alto based employees and residents will be eligible to submit proposals.

Assistance : Morelab, an interdisciplinary art and design studio led by Rebar Art and Design Studio co-founder Matthew Passamore, will be available to provide prototype training and provide implementation coaching to the selected intervention proposal teams.

National Day of Civic Hacking – More Geeks on the Street: (June 3rd) NDoCH will partner with Code:ART for this event, providing an opportunity for all types of innovators and technologists to participate on civic challenges.

Talks: The City of Palo Alto and Institute for the Future will facilitate discussions between business representatives and residents about the benefits and challenges of living/working/visiting the downtown area, gather feedback on the festival installations, and discuss long term planning and implementation. These discussions should yield valuable information gaging interest in future events or long term implementation of some of the prototype ideas.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The National Endowment for the Arts recommended funding in the amount of $30,000 to support the Code:ART initiative. NEA grant funds require a minimum 1:1 match. With a contribution from the Information Technology Department, Public Art CIP Funds, and the Art Works Grant funding, that leaves approximately $20,000 more in fundraising necessary to fulfill the project budget goal.