

TOWN OF WINDSOR AGENDA REPORT

Joint Windsor Town Council, Windsor Redevelopment Successor Agency and Windsor Water District Meeting Date: January 15, 2025

To: Mayor and Town Councilmembers
From: Olivia Lemen, Parks and Recreation Director
Subject: Central Windsor Underpass Mural Project

Recommendation to Council:

1. Receive the recommendation from the Public Art Advisory Commission regarding the Central Windsor Underpass Mural Project.
2. Adopt a resolution rescinding Resolution No. 3769-22 approving the design proposal submitted to the California Department of Transportation for the Transportation Art Program.
3. Provide Staff with direction for next steps for the Central Windsor Underpass Mural Project.

Strategic Plan Element:

The recommended action supports the goal of Livability. Goal Statement: Preserve community character by maximizing the use of existing amenities and creating future opportunities that enhance quality of life for all.

Background:

On June 15, 2022, the Town Council adopted Resolution 3769-22 (Attachment 2) approving the Central Windsor Underpass Mural Project and appointing the Town Manager as the Town's designee for all matters regarding the California Department of Transportation (CalTrans) Transportation Art Proposal application. This resolution also approved the final concept design (Project) (Attachment 3) for the mural as presented by Rima Makaryan (Artist), Executive Director and Founder of the Monarch Project. The Monarch Project is a local non-profit whose mission is to use art to tell the stories of immigrants, to empower the community and to humanize the people who are lost in the politics.

The mural was titled Repetition of History and Breaking Cycles. According to the Artist, the concept leans heavily on the Native American history of the local area. It recognizes that Windsor's history, as it has been told and recorded, has been centered on the "settler" history, leaving the hugely pertinent Native American history of the region untold.

The design concept was developed through a series of community conversations and workshops. The Artist also presented to the Public Art Advisory Commission (Commission) on multiple occasions before the final concept draft was presented on May 25, 2022. The Commission provided positive feedback to the Artist and the design proposal was unanimously recommended to the Town Council for consideration at the June 15, 2022, meeting.

The site includes 24 concrete pillars (three groups of eight) and a wall located on the north side which is approximately 200 feet in length and seven feet high. Inspired by other local public art murals done by the Monarch Project, the goal for this Project is to create an experience for pedestrians, bikers and drivers along this stretch of roadway.

At the time of Council approval, the Project was presented to be a part of the Central Windsor Expansion. In 2018, the Town completed a visioning study which proposed reconfiguring the intersection of Lakewood Drive and Old Redwood Highway where the California State Highway Route 101 (Hwy 101) passes over the roadway. This expansion project (Attachment 4) has been included in the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and is currently in the design phase. This design project is being managed by the Town's Public Works Department.

Given the CIP project timeline in 2022, the mural Project was expected to be phased to prevent the demolition of art during construction. The pillar murals would be prioritized over the wall mural for the first phase of the Project.

The overcrossing structure is within CalTrans right-of-way and jurisdiction. Painting or modifications of any kind require the submission and approval of a Transportation Art Proposal, a maintenance agreement and issuance of a Caltrans encroachment permit. Upon approval from the Town Council, Staff began the process of completing the extensive application process. Part of the application required a traffic safety plan completed by a Traffic Engineer for the entirety of the Project. The estimated cost to execute this plan was in excess of \$100,000. With those anticipated costs likely to make the entire Project cost prohibitive, Staff created a new timeline to better align with the Public Works CIP project. The Transportation Art Proposal application was submitted to Caltrans in September of 2023 and is currently under review.

Discussion:

Since the Project was submitted to CalTrans, several things have changed which impact the future of the Project. Staff felt it was prudent for the Commission to consider the Project with this new information and, if necessary, provide a new recommendation to the Town Council.

On February 23, 2024, the CalTrans application was considered by District 4 Transportation Art Committee (DTAC). The Project was received favorably however the DTAC had reservations regarding the hand gestures and the potential for offensive interpretation or misrepresentation that could be drawn from that portion of the design. The DTAC recommended modifying the design to eliminate the hand gestures all together, leaving only the woven patterns, or modifying the hand gestures in such a way that they cannot be misinterpreted.

During that same time period, feedback was received from the Progressive Tribal Alliance (PTA) regarding the basket weaving patterns on the Project which were not previously mentioned during the review period for the Project. During presentations throughout the design process, the Artist had shared the perceived meaning of these designs. After the Project approval by the Town Council, the PTA shared that this information may not be accurate.

PTA was instrumental in the Wisdom Tree Mural, which was installed on the north side of the Huerta Gymnasium in 2023. For this project, the design and painting were done by local native artists through a series of community workshops with local tribal community members. Ultimately, the mural was painted by Native artists representing the local indigenous culture. This process was well received by the Native community and this mural is highly regarded.

The Wisdom Tree Mural is an example of the way the Town is making strides forward, strengthening partnerships of local Tribal Nations and indigenous organizations, including PTA. In April of 2024, the Town made another major step towards authentic representation with the renaming of a Windsor Park after a local Pomo leader, David Smith. Ensuring all projects contribute to a meaningful and accurate representation of Native culture, history and traditions is a top priority of the Town.

Given the feedback from the DTAC and the new information on the basket designs obtained in early 2024, Staff reached out to the Artist and entered into a small redesign agreement to rework the Project to better reflect the local Pomo designs in a culturally appropriate manner and rework the hand gestures based on the DTAC recommendations. Staff also connected the Artist directly with the President of PTA to act as a conduit to other Native community members who could assist and ensure the accuracy of the designs being represented in the Project.

Over the summer of 2024, the Artist met with Staff and PTA and provided an alternate approach to reworking the Project. After that meeting, PTA shared the formal opinion (Attachment 5) that if the intended goal of this mural is to honor the heritage and cultural significance of our Native community within the Town, then the entire project should be reconsidered and seek an artist from within the Native American community to complete the design and ultimately the mural.

At this point, the redesign of the Project is on-hold and is awaiting further direction from Town Council. The Town has a variety of options to consider for this project:

- Commission Recommendation: Council reject the Project approval resolution (Attachment 1) and give direction to Staff to draft a new RFP for a mural design with the same theme of recognizing and honoring our Native cultural traditions and heritage.
- Alternative Considerations:
 - Continue as approved and redesign the Project to meet DTAC approval with existing Artist.
 - Council rejects the Project approval resolution and do not seek a new mural design at this time.
 - Council rejects the Project approval resolution and draft an RFP for a new mural design with a new theme.

The Town originally spent \$2,000 for the design services of the Project and has an outstanding agreement for an additional \$750 for the redesign. These fees were drastically reduced from industry standard due to the Monarch Project being a new non-profit at the time. For comparison, the design services for the Wisdom Tree Mural artists were \$9,000. To start the RFP and design process from the beginning, it is anticipated that the design costs could be anywhere from \$8,000-\$12,000. This funding is not included in the current budget and could be included as part of the new budget process for FY25-27.

Fiscal Impact:

Redesign fees are anticipated to be \$8,000-\$12,000. This funding is not included in the FY23-25 Budget. If directed to redesign the mural, Staff will present associated costs for consideration during the FY 25-27 budget process.

Environmental Review:

The recommended action is not subject to review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Attachment(s):

1. Resolution
2. Resolution 3769-22
3. Windsor Overpass Mural Design
4. Connecting Windsor Excerpt
5. Progressive Tribal Alliance Communication
- 13.1 PowerPoint (Distributed 2025-01-14)

Prepared by:
Olivia Lemen
Parks and Recreation Director

Recommended by:
Jon Davis
Town Manager