

STAFF REPORT

MEETING

DATE: November 14, 2024

TO: Recreation, Cultural and Community Services Advisory Commission

FROM: Drew Bendickson, Community Services Division Manager

SUBJECT: CONSIDER APPROVING THE LEADERSHIP NOVATO CLASS OF 2025 TEAM BIG ROCK RIDGE'S PROPOSED GRANT AVENUE BEAUTIFICATION "UTILITY BOX ART" SERVICE PROJECT UNDER THE CITY'S ART IN PUBLIC PLACES PROGRAM AND CONSIDER RECOMMENDING AN ALLOCATION OF \$3,000 FROM THE PUBLIC ART FUND FOR CITY COUNCIL TO CONSIDER**REQUEST**

Consider approving the Leadership Novato Class of 2025 Team Big Rock Ridge's proposed Grant Avenue Beautification "Utility Box Art" Service Project concept under the City's Art in Public Places Program, and consider making a recommendation to Novato City Council to approve allocating \$3,000 from the Public Art Fund to support the project.

DISCUSSION

For over thirty years, the Novato Chamber of Commerce has developed community leaders through its Leadership Novato program. This premier program operates in partnership with the City of Novato and other key public agencies, preparing participants to lead in the community while focusing on making a meaningful difference in Novato. The program runs from September to May, with monthly sessions featuring executive leaders addressing critical community topics. A cornerstone of the program is the completion of group service projects, which provide hands-on experience in team dynamics, creativity, and problem-solving while making tangible improvements to the community. The Class of 2025 is divided into three teams, each taking on different community service projects, with Team Big Rock Ridge selecting a City of Novato beautification initiative.

For their 2024-2025 service project, Team Big Rock Ridge selected a City of Novato submission from Sustainability Coordinator Gretchen Schubeck, who submitted the application on the City's behalf requesting support in beautifying the downtown area. After researching successful programs in neighboring communities like San Rafael and Windsor (attachment 1), the team developed a proposal to implement a Utility Box Art Program in downtown Novato.

Working in collaboration with Gretchen, the team has identified seven City-owned utility boxes (attachment 2) along Grant Avenue suitable for artistic enhancement. As these boxes are City-owned property and the project involves the installation of original artwork in public spaces, it falls under the City's Art In Public Places Program and Policy Administrative Policy 5.13 (attachment 3), which governs the inclusion of visual arts in public spaces throughout Novato. The policy designates the Recreation, Cultural and Community Services Advisory Commission (RCCS) as responsible for reviewing and making recommendations on public art initiatives, which is why Team Big Rock Ridge is presenting their concept to the Commission for initial approval. If approved by the Commission, the team will proceed with developing program guidelines, a call for artists and artist agreements to be released in mid-December.

The goal of this project is for artists to reflect different elements of Novato — nature, local events, and our history—and turn these into visuals that tell Novato's story. The proposed artwork will follow the theme "A Vision for the Present," which seeks to celebrate Novato's rich history, natural beauty, and the spirit of our community. Through this project, artists will have a unique opportunity

to share our community's story through public art. The team encourages artists to envision a present-day Novato that pays homage to its past while celebrating its unique identity.

Artists will be encouraged to draw inspiration from a variety of aspects, including:

- Natural Landscapes: Highlighting our local parks, open spaces, and native flora and fauna, embodying the tranquility and beauty of Novato's natural environment
- Cultural Moments: Reflecting our community's lively events and gatherings, from farmers markets and festivals to quiet moments of connection and everyday life
- Historical Narratives: Celebrating our city's heritage through artistic interpretations of historical landmarks and significant events that have shaped Novato into what it is today
- Community Spirit: Illustrating the values that make Novato unique — honoring our past while welcoming a vibrant future

Through this project, Team Big Rock Ridge hopes to create a public art experience that connects residents and visitors with the essence of Novato, sparking reflection as Novato's story continues to unfold.

Team Big Rock Ridge presented their utility box art project concept to the Downtown Novato Business Association (DNBA) Board of Directors at their Wednesday, November 6, 2024, meeting. The DNBA has expressed their support for this initiative through a formal letter of support (attachment 4), recognizing its potential to enhance the downtown corridor's visual appeal and create engaging points of interest for visitors along Grant Avenue.

Project Timeline:

- November 6, 2024: Present to DNBA Board of Directors
- November 14, 2024: Present to RCCS for concept approval and allocation of Public Art funds
- December 3, 2024: Present RCCS recommendations to City Council for approval
- Mid-December 2024: Release call for artists and application
- January 2025: Application period closes
- February/March 2025: Present selected artwork to RCCS Commission for review and recommendations to City Council
- March/April 2025: Submit Commission recommendations to City Council for final approval
- April-May 2025: Artist installation period
- May 2025: Community celebration event to unveil completed utility box artwork

To ensure the project's long-term success and minimize impact on City resources, several support measures have been proposed. Team Big Rock Ridge is requesting an allocation of \$3,000 from CIP 11-019 Public Art Projects to support artist stipends for this initiative. Combined with the City's Sustainability Division contribution of \$3,000, this would provide \$6,000 total for artist stipends. This funding would allow for artist compensation between \$850-\$1,000 per utility box, depending on the final number of boxes selected. There are currently funds available in CIP 11-019 to support this request. If allocating funds is approved by the Commission, this funding recommendation will be forwarded to City Council for final approval at their upcoming December 3, 2024, City Council Meeting.

Additional support measures include:

1. Artist agreements will include maintenance provisions and contact information, with future touch-up costs supported through the City's Public Art Projects Fund
2. Team Big Rock Ridge will coordinate with Public Works regarding anti-graffiti coating application for the boxes
3. Pini Hardware has committed to donating the primer needed for artists to prepare the utility boxes before painting

To protect both the City's interests and ensure the project's long-term success, Team Big Rock Ridge will develop comprehensive artist agreements modeled after successful utility box art programs in neighboring cities.

The artist agreements will outline key requirements including:

- Artwork ownership transfers to the City of Novato upon completion

- Final painted artwork must match the approved design submission
- Artists must use high-quality exterior acrylic paint
- Artwork cannot interfere with utility box function or access
- Rights and responsibilities regarding artwork maintenance and potential removal

Based on similar programs in other cities, the typical lifespan of utility box artwork ranges from 3-5 years, depending on environmental conditions and maintenance.

If the Commission approves this concept, Team Big Rock Ridge will proceed with developing the program guidelines and artist agreements, releasing the call for artists in mid-December. If allocating funds is approved by the Commission, this funding recommendation will be forwarded to City Council for final approval at their upcoming December 3, 2024, City Council Meeting. The team will return to the Commission in February/March 2025 with selected artwork proposals for review. Following Commission review and approval, recommendations will be made to City Council for final approval, after which artists can begin the painting process, bringing new public art to downtown Novato.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

This item is listed on the Recreation, Cultural & Community Services Commission agenda, which is posted on the City’s Community Service Board and website 72 hours prior to the Commission meeting as required by California Government Code 54954(a) (“Brown Act”). It is also posted on the City’s website at novato.org/councilagendas.

FISCAL IMPACT

Staff has verified with the Finance Department that CIP 11-019 Public Art Projects funds can support this project. The project has secured \$3,000 from the City’s Sustainability Division. Team Big Rock Ridge is requesting an additional \$3,000 from CIP 11-019 to support artist stipends for this initiative. Combined, these funds would provide \$6,000 for artist stipends, allowing for compensation between \$850-\$1,000 per utility box depending on the final number of boxes selected. If approved by the Commission, this funding recommendation will be forwarded to City Council for final approval at their December 3, 2024, meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Approve the Leadership Novato Utility Box Art Project concept under the Art in Public Places Program.
2. Recommend allocating \$3,000 funds from the Public Art Fund to support implementation of Leadership Novato Utility Box Art Service Project

ALTERNATIVES

1. Make changes and provide direction to staff.
2. Do not approve and provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENT

1. Attachment 1 – Utility Box Art Examples
2. Attachment 2 – Proposed Utility Boxes & Locations
3. Attachment 3 – Art In Public Places, Admin Policy 5.13
4. Attachment 4 – DNBA Letter of Support