

**CITY OF ALBANY
ARTS COMMITTEE
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda date: 9/10/2012
Prepared by: ALH

SUBJECT: Proposed Art Installation at 1035 Eastshore Highway

PROPERTY OWNER: Tim Southwick, President of Toyota of Berkeley

APPLICANT: Phillip Banta, Phillip Banta & Associates Architecture

SITE: 1035 Eastshore Highway

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Arts Committee review the following:

1. Determine if the proposed LED screen will satisfy the Art in Public places requirement.
2. Forward a recommendation to City Council for approval.

BACKGROUND

The applicant received Planning & Zoning Commission approval to have auto sales and service at 1035 Eastshore Highway. The Commission also approved a building design which is modern in appearance and includes, glass and steel materials. As part of the approval, the applicant is required to comply with Section 20.58 "Art in Public Places Program" of the Albany Municipal Code. A rendering of the building is contained as Attachment 1.

PROPOSAL

The applicant consulted with staff and indicated that he would like to install an LED screen in the interior of the showroom. The screen will be visible from the exterior of the building as it is glass. A rendering of the proposed screen is included with this report.

A draft fee estimate determined that the Art in Public Places fee for this project is approximately, \$17,000. In speaking with the applicant, the cost of the screen is nearly double the fee.

Attachments

1. Rendering of New Building
2. Rendering of Proposed LED Screen
3. Article on LED Screens as Public Art

**ATTACHMENT 1
RENDERING OF NEW BUILDING**





Item 8-1

Reinventing Public Art, Thousands of LEDs at a Time

- [Anthony Flint](#)
- Jul 06, 2012
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At the Boston Harbor Islands pavilion on Boston's [Rose Kennedy Greenway](#), brightly lit screens beckon the late-night wanderer, long after the visitor center has closed. Take a closer look, and waves made by individual bar graphs appear, a bit like the sound readout on old stereo systems. The thick, undulating brush strokes are all based on thousands of pieces of data, collected over a

season in the vast archipelago – the height of the tides, the speed of the winds, even the flights of bees.

The electronic portrait is part of the burgeoning phenomenon of digital art, where the canvas is an LED screen. The visual muscle of digital art all but announces a potential transformation in public art in the city. It could make graffiti bombing and innovative artists like JR, with his giant eyes on the facades of the favelas, seem quaint by comparison.

The pied piper for digital art is not a world traveling Frenchman but a friendly, full-bearded Bostonian, George Fifield, founder of [Boston Cyberarts](#). Based in the burgeoning arts community in the Jamaica Plain section, Fifield identifies video art on [urban screens](#) as a worldwide phenomenon, from Times Square to Bucharest to [Seoul](#), where a media mural as big as a football field lights up the urban environment.

"This is the new public art," he says, about as far from "bronze statues of dead white guys, or static pop art" as he can imagine.

The project that was most inspiring for Fifield was an unlikely candidate – a sign in front of a convention center. The Boston Exhibition & Convention Center, a massive, gulf-winged building designed by Raphael Vinoly on former industrial land in Boston's emerging Seaport district, sought to announce its presence with an 80-foot electronic billboard illuminated by 2.8 million LED lights. The Massachusetts Convention Center Authority didn't want just headlines for bio-tech or computer conventions, however, so designers started to explore what [some public art](#) would look like on the soaring structure.



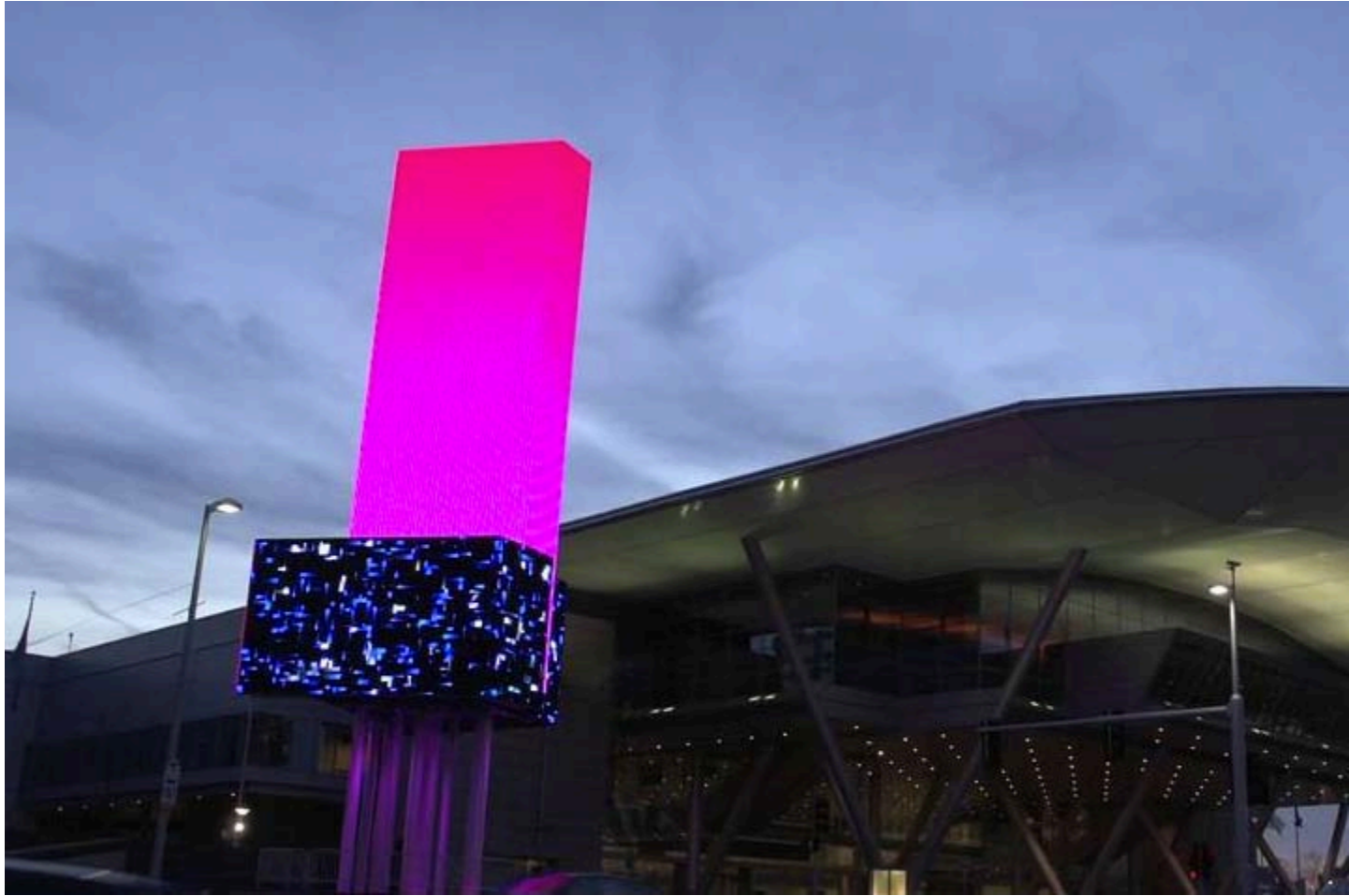
Some past exhibits, courtesy of [Boston CyberArts](#)

It looked really good, as it turned out. Some 14 artists contributed as many installations, creating a library of rotating art. In Jeff Warmouth's [Fall](#), a figure seems to float in slow motion down the marquee. Others are:

- Dennis Miller – [Marathon](#)
- Ellen Wetmore - [Blue Boy Jumping](#)
- Nell Breyer - [Falling Men](#)
- Kawandee Virdee - [Urban Bloom](#)
- Ellen Wetmore – [Pacing](#)
- John Slepian – [Sigh](#)

Tim Love, a principal at [Utile](#) and designer of the Harbor Islands Pavilion and the marquee at the Convention Center, saw the place-making potential of large media screens – a way to present iconic contemporary design that engages public audiences. He was introduced to Fifield by Nick Capasso, the chief curator at the DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln, and established an ambitious, curatorial approach.





Blue Boy Jumping and Urban Bloom, still images via Vimeo

“The success of the programming to date has created a rare moment to push the boundaries of this new technology in the public realm,” says Love, who sees digital art as a big opportunity for cities worldwide.

Boston may fancy itself a leader in digital arts in America. In addition to the convention center and Harbor Islands pavilion installations, there’s the big screen on the new WGBH building in Allston-Brighton, visible from the Massachusetts Turnpike, and a media façade on the Paramount theatre at Emerson College in the Theatre District, where the LED displays are arrayed in the [windows of the building](#).

In the future, Fifield predicts, LED screens may be fully integrated into architecture and interior design, and extend to other cultural fronts, such as fashion, the [galaxy dress](#) designed by CuteCircuit being one example.

Fifield was among the presentations at [TEDx Boston](#) last month. Boston Cyberarts organizes an annual digital [arts festival in the summer as well](#).

Keywords: [Boston](#), [Public Art](#), [Graffiti](#)



Anthony Flint is a fellow at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, a think tank in Cambridge, Mass., and author of *Wrestling With Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took On New York's Master Builder and Transformed the American City* and *This Land: The Battle Over Sprawl and the Future of America*. His next book, *The Raven: The Life of Le Corbusier, Maker of the Modern* will be published in the fall of 2014 by Amazon Publishing. [All posts »](#)