



Information Item

Date: August 10, 2016

To: Mayor and City Council
From: Karen Ginsberg, Community & Cultural Services Director
Subject: City of Santa Monica Utility Box Art Pilot Project

Introduction

This report outlines the background and status of a pilot project to place public art on City-owned traffic control utility boxes. On [November 10th, 2015](#), City Council approved the recommendation for staff to “create a process and guidelines for painting or wrapping utility boxes, to pilot such a program on Ocean Park and Lincoln Boulevards where the community has expressed interest in such public art, and to return to Council with the pilot results and possible plans for a program expansion.” In addition, Montana Avenue has been identified as a pilot opportunity. Beautify Earth, a non-profit art and mural-painting ensemble, led the development of this effort by initiating contact with the Ocean Park Association (OPA) and the Montana Avenue Merchants Association (MAMA) to secure their respective board’s support for the utility box art project. At the [November 24, 2015 City Council meeting](#), City staff gave an update on the Lincoln Neighborhood Corridor Plan (LiNC), which included information about the planned utility box project in that area.

This Information Item details the current status of utility box art installations on Lincoln Boulevard and Montana Avenue, and describes the Ocean Park Boulevard project, which will pilot a new City process for future utility box art projects. If the pilot proves successful, the utility boxes will be updated with new art every year or two, allowing more artists to participate in the program.

Background

Art has the power to transform public spaces. Beyond enhancing the visual aesthetic of our built environment, public art can strengthen connections between place and community. In many neighborhoods, public art can help foster identity of the community, while also welcoming visitors and making business districts more lively. Public art installations located in surprising places are magnets for social media posts by visitors, resulting in free word-of-mouth advertising for the City.

Increasingly, utilitarian objects, such as utility boxes, are viewed as canvases that have the potential to enhance the visual environment, while also spotlighting artists from the city and region. Utility box art also has the added benefit of encouraging potential new partnerships between City departments, local businesses, neighborhood organizations and artists. As the City of Santa Monica seeks to beautify its environment through creative placemaking, incorporating artwork into City-owned utility boxes is a cost-effective way to further this goal.

Discussion

Staff from the Departments of Community & Cultural Services, Planning & Community Development and Housing and Economic Development have been collaborating with community members on this work as further outlined below.

Lincoln Boulevard

The Lincoln corridor south of the I-10 freeway includes six traffic control boxes, and is the subject of an effort, led by the Planning and Community Development Department (PCD), to improve the quality of the streetscape and local business environment through the [Lincoln Neighborhood Corridor Plan](#) (“The LiNC”) (Attachment A). Last year, City staff from PCD and artists from Beautify Earth worked collaboratively with students at Olympic High School to develop a variety of designs to be placed at each of the six signalized intersections between Marine Street and Olympic Boulevard. A post-production effort is ongoing to enhance the artwork digitally and prepare it for

reproduction. City staff will manage the printing of artwork on graffiti-resistant vinyl and professional installation to cover the utility boxes. The first art wrap, which will be placed at the intersection of Ocean Park and Lincoln, is slated for installation by end of summer 2016. Other wraps will be installed over the coming months, as funding allows, with completion slated for the beginning of 2017. Each wrap will cost approximately \$750 to install, which includes a small portion of the budget allocated to cleaning and pretreatment of the utility box. The budget for this corridor is comprised of City funding and local business and neighborhood group sponsorship.

Montana Avenue

The project on Montana Avenue is being overseen by the Housing and Economic Development Department (HED), in partnership with the Montana Avenue Merchants Association (MAMA). HED worked in partnership with Sustainable Works and the Office of Sustainability and the Environment (OSE) to conduct a call for student artwork around the theme *Buy Local Santa Monica*. Four of the winning student artworks will be painted onto utility boxes along Montana Avenue between 7th Street and 17th Street. City staff and MAMA representatives are currently working to identify which utility boxes will be painted. The utility boxes will be painted over the coming months, to be completed by Beautify Earth in partnership with local artists and the featured student artists. MAMA will pay an estimated \$1,000 for the installation of each box (artist, paint and materials), and they will be responsible for any maintenance needed during the temporary (1-2 year) lifespan of each design, which will be outlined in an agreement between the City and MAMA. While the Lincoln Boulevard boxes will be wrapped, the art for these will be painted directly onto the box and covered with an anti-graffiti coating. After the Lincoln and Montana boxes have been completed, City staff will evaluate which of the two methods (wrap versus paint) are the most effective for future installations.

Ocean Park Boulevard

This project on Ocean Park Boulevard is designed to pilot a public process for selecting artists and installing art on utility boxes that could be used as a model for future installations. It is being overseen by the City's Community & Cultural Services Department, Cultural Affairs Division (CAD), in partnership with PCD, HED and the Ocean Park Association (OPA). There are seven city-owned utility boxes located along Ocean Park Blvd between Lincoln Boulevard and Ocean Avenue.

A Call for Artists (RFQ) is being drafted and will launch this summer. The call will be open to artists residing in Los Angeles County, and will be marketed broadly to ensure a good response rate. A selection panel will review the applications and select seven artists to participate in the Ocean Park pilot project, in consultation with the city's Public Art Committee. We anticipate the boxes will begin being painted (or wrapped) in the fall, with completion by the end of the calendar year.

Pilot Program Process

In the coming months, a sponsorship plan will be developed, which will outline packages for both individual businesses and merchants associations/ business improvement districts (BIDs) to support the implementation of art boxes in their neighborhoods. Pico Boulevard, Main Street and Downtown Santa Monica are all potential future opportunity areas.

Once the Ocean Park pilot is installed, the process will be evaluated and refined prior to it being rolled out to more neighborhoods throughout the city. Staff is also exploring opportunities to implement this program on utility boxes in Santa Monica that are not owned by the City, in partnership with Southern California Edison.

Once the Lincoln Boulevard, Montana Avenue and Ocean Park Boulevard pilot projects have been completed, staff will provide City Council with a report and recommendations for this program moving forward.

Attachment A: Lincoln Boulevard

Prepared By:

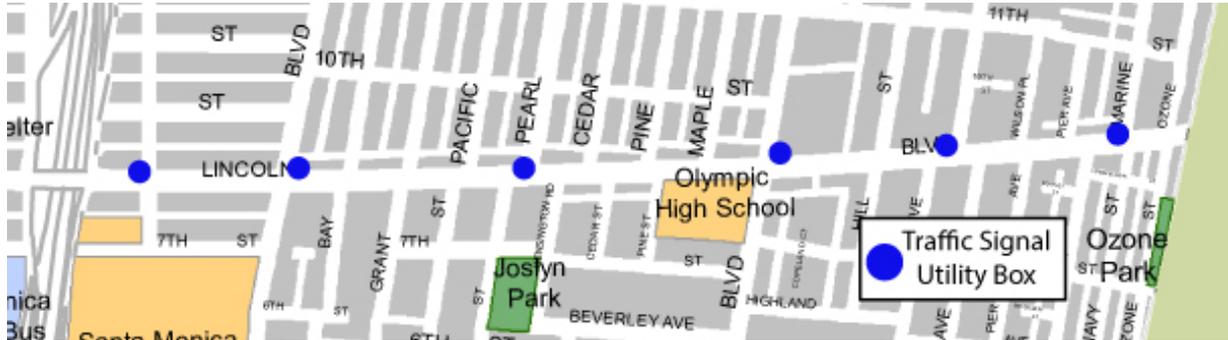
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ATTACHMENT A

Lincoln Boulevard Map of Utility Boxes



DRAFT Design

Utility Box shape and cut outs

