

Agenda Report

May 5, 2025

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Planning and Community Development Department

SUBJECT: **CALL FOR REVIEW OF THE ARTS & CULTURE COMMISSION'S
DECISION TO DISAPPROVE THE PROPOSED ARTIST AND
CONCEPT ART PLAN FOR 2915 EAST COLORADO BOULEVARD
(PASADENA RUSNAK PORSCHE)**

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the City Council:

1. Find that the overall project was subject to environmental review per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). On July 15, 2024, the City Council adopted a Mitigated Negative Declaration for the overall project and there are no changed circumstances or new information which would require further environmental review. In addition, the proposed onsite public artwork is categorically exempt from CEQA per Section 15303 (Class 3, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures) of the Government Code; and
2. Adopt the findings in Attachment A to uphold Staff's recommendation and approve the proposed Artist and Concept Art Plan, with the conditions in Attachment B.

BACKGROUND:

On April 9, 2025, the Arts & Culture Commission reviewed the proposed Artist and Concept Art Plan for a new auto dealership at 2915 East Colorado Boulevard ("Pasadena Rusnak Porsche"). The proposed artwork is a large-scale aluminum trellis structure installed at the northeast corner of Colorado Boulevard and Sunny Slope Avenue. Measuring 118 feet wide, 14 feet tall and 24 feet wide, the structure consists of an organic, open framework of arches and pillars, extending over the front (southern) portion of the property, which will be used for vehicle display.

At this meeting, Staff recommended approval of the proposed Artist and Concept Art Plan (Attachments C and D). At the conclusion of the Applicant's ("Rusnak Porsche's") presentation, a majority of the members of the Arts & Culture Commission determined

that the proposed project does not comply with the goals, objectives and eligible criteria outlined in the City's Private Development Public Art Program Guidelines ("Guidelines" or "Public Art Guidelines") (Attachment E). As a result, the Commission disapproved the Public Art Application by a 5-4 vote.

On April 10, 2025, Councilmember Gene Masuda requested a Call for Review of the decision. On April 14, 2025, the item was called for review by the City Council. The hearing before the City Council is a *de novo* hearing where the Council has no obligation to honor the prior decisions and has the authority to make an entirely different decision.

PREVIOUS PROJECT REVIEWS:

The Applicant proposes establishing an auto dealership on a 4.4-acre site bounded by Colorado Boulevard to the south, Sunny Slope Avenue to the west and Walnut Street to the north. Since the project will involve more than 25,000 square feet of construction, it is subject to the City's Public Art Ordinance for new, private development, which is administered through the Guidelines. To date, the project has undergone the following reviews:

- Design Commission - May 24, 2022: The Commission reviewed the Preliminary Consultation for this project. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Design Commission made several recommendations to the applicant, including:
Recommendation No. 3: Consider a freestanding structure along the street edge to enhance the pedestrian environment, and to create a relationship to the broader context of Pasadena's architectural legacy along Colorado Boulevard.
- Planning Commission - July 27, 2022: The Commission completed its first review of the project. Entitlements included a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to establish the auto dealership, Minor Variance to increase building setbacks along Colorado Boulevard and Sunny Slope Avenue, and a Street Vacation to vacate the eastern terminus of Nina Street. At the conclusion of the public hearing, the Commission continued the hearing to allow the applicant an opportunity to address the Design Commission's recommendations, consider a layout in conformance with required setbacks and retain the Swanson & Peterson building.
- Design Workshop - June 2023: The Applicant notified Staff that they intended to commission an onsite public artwork to satisfy their public art obligation and invited Staff to view the results of a design workshop facilitated with students from ArtCenter College of Design.
- Planning Commission - May 8, 2024: The Commission held a public hearing to consider the proposed entitlements. The majority of the Commission supported the Minor Variance (along Sunny Slope Avenue only) and Street Vacation. However, they did not support the CUP because they believed the project did not comply with the East Colorado Specific Plan (2003) and did not provide an original building design.

- City Council - July 15, 2024: The Council approved the project with all proposed entitlements.
- Design Commission - October 8, 2024: The Commission approved the Concept Design for the project. The proposed public artwork is not subject to Design Review.
- Art & Culture Commission - April 9, 2025: The Commission disapproved the proposed Artist and Concept Art Plan, by a 5-4 vote.

PUBLIC ART APPLICATION:

The Guidelines outline the eligibility, program requirements and administrative procedures. Developers are provided with the option to commission onsite public artwork in alignment with the Guidelines or pay the public art in-lieu fee to satisfy their public art requirement.

The proposed artwork concept is the result of a collaboration between the Applicant and ArtCenter College of Design. In June 2023, ArtCenter facilitated a three-day design workshop, engaging students to create designs for public artwork in response to the development site and Porsche's automotive brand. Following selection of the student's design, ArtCenter alum and faculty-member, Jason Pilarski, was selected as the project's Lead Artist. The applicant submitted their Public Art application on August 14, 2024 and hired James Meraz, ArtCenter faculty-member as the project's Public Art Consultant, whose role is to work with the developer to initiate a Strategic Art Plan for the project and guide the overall artwork development process.

The proposed artwork includes a large-scale sculptural trellis structure to be installed at the northeast corner of Colorado Boulevard and Sunny Slope Avenue. Measuring approximately 118 feet wide, 14 feet tall, and 24 feet wide, the artwork will be constructed from laser-cut aluminum panels riveted to an aluminum frame and anchored to concrete pads throughout the surrounding hardscape. The design includes an open framework trellis structure, with sweeping arches and angled pillars that frame the surrounding hardscape along the site's street edge. The artist was inspired by Porsche's distinct automotive design style, characterized by organic curved edges and innovative engineering, as well as biomimicry – design principles derived from strategies found in nature.

The project also incorporates a mix of landscaped and hardscape elements beneath the artwork, which offer space for display vehicles, as well as accommodating pedestrian and vehicular access. During the CUP process, the free-standing artwork structure was identified as a feature that ensures compliance with the setback requirement along Colorado Boulevard. The development team intends to utilize the area beneath the artwork structure to display vehicles (the Zoning Code does not require vehicles be parked or displayed in this area). The applicant has indicated that the space may also be used occasionally for special events and gatherings.

ARTS & CULTURE COMMISSION:

Reviewing Criteria and Findings

The Guidelines establish the role of the Arts & Culture Commission and evaluation criteria for reviewing public art proposals. The Public Art Consultant is required to submit the proposed Artist and Concept Art Plan to the Commission for review and approval. The proposed Artist and Concept Art Plan are reviewed using the following criteria:

- Artistic quality (vision, originality and craftsmanship);
- Site context (architectural, historical, geographical and socio-cultural context);
- Quality and permanency of materials;
- Maintenance;
- Safety;
- Diversity of artists (gender, race, culture) representation in the existing collection of publicly accessible artworks; and
- Diversity of artworks (media, scale, style, intention) in the existing collection of publicly accessible artworks.

The proposed Artist and Concept Art Plan must comply with the goals, objectives and eligible criteria outlined in the Guidelines, as summarized below:

1. The proposed artist currently works in the public realm, has demonstrated past experience and proven technical and aesthetic ability to successfully create an artwork responsive to the site and community;
2. The proposed artist is sensitive to the City's aesthetic diversity and can contribute to the characteristics, contribution, aspirations and unique expressions of Pasadena's values;
3. The proposed artwork encourages public dialogue and interaction with art in public places;
4. The proposed artwork supports the inclusion of a broad range of works of art, reflective of the overall diversity of current works in the field of public art; and
5. The proposed artwork supports a public art collection composed of artworks of varied genres, styles, scales, media, form and intent, and reflects trends and disciplines in art on a local, regional, national and international arts level.

Arts & Culture Commission Meeting: April 9, 2025

The Public Art Consultant presented the proposed Artist and Concept Art Plan to the Arts & Culture Commission. Prior to the public meeting, the City did not receive any public comments on the proposal.

The Commission was complimentary of the project and expressed appreciation for the applicants' efforts and the considerable thought and planning put into the artwork's design. At the conclusion of the Applicant's presentation, five members of the Commission determined that the proposed project does not comply with the eligible

criteria and goals outlined in the Guidelines. As a result, the Commission disapproved the Public Art application by a 5-4 vote.

The following outlines the Commission's reasons for disapproval of the project (along with Staff's reasonings for approval):

1. Commission Concern: Parking display vehicles underneath the artwork hinders the public's physical access and aesthetic appreciation, framing the sculpture in a commercial context detracting from its perceived value as a work of art.

Staff's Response: The artwork's trellis-like design incorporates large openings that maintain visual transparency. While allowing for views of display vehicles and the Porsche building, the proposed artwork can still function as a site-specific aesthetic element. The Applicant does not intend to display vehicles in a traditional manner (where vehicles are parked close together in rows). Rather, a limited number of vehicles will be strategically spaced behind the artwork. The limited placement of vehicles will not detract from the artwork and will allow ample space for visitors to walk around the trellis structure and admire the artwork. There are no permanent barriers proposed for this space and the applicant has stated that it can be used occasionally as an area for special events and gatherings. The hardscape is designed for flexibility in the use of the space, and it is not paved for parking like other areas of the site. Landscaping, grass-crete and other hardscape elements are integrated into the siting of the artwork.

2. Commission Concern: The proposed artwork is dual purpose as it also functions as a structure to comply with the setback requirements of the East Colorado Specific Plan.

Staff's Response: The fact that the trellis structure also meets the setback standard for the project has no bearing on whether the artwork meets the Guidelines. Further, during Preliminary Consultation, the Design Commission advised the applicant to consider developing a freestanding structure along the East Colorado Boulevard frontage to enhance the pedestrian experience. In response, the Applicant proposed a freestanding trellis structure that engages the pedestrian while providing a definitive public artwork.

The City's Public Art Guidelines allow for a broad interpretation of public art and the guidelines specifically state the program shall be "receptive to the broadest definitions of art that will encourage imaginative interpretations of all media". The work must be artist-designed and produced, and functional elements are permitted. Permitted media and materials may include, but are not limited to, fixtures such as gates, streetlights, signage, paving, benches, and bus shelters – provided the functional elements are uniquely designed or produced by an artist. The City's Public Art Collection includes examples of artwork that also serve a functional purpose such as doorways, benches, and building canopies. The artwork is also considered a three-dimensional artwork of which any kind is

permitted per the guidelines. As such the proposed artwork complies with the guidelines.

3. Commission Concern: The artwork was designed to match the brand and visual aesthetics of the Porsche Corporation and the exterior of the building.

Staff's Response: A design workshop with the ArtCenter College of Design resulted in several artwork concepts. While the students were inspired by elements of the Porsche brand (e.g., the speed of driving, the curves of the vehicle, the way light reflects from metal, etc.), the concepts do not directly integrate the Porsche brand. The proposed artwork incorporates materials and aesthetic considerations that compliment the site and align with the surrounding landscape and architecture. The artwork is site specific, designed for the corner location and considers the placement of other structures on the site. This is often seen with large scale art installations. There is no specific corporate branding, colors or logos that would identify the artwork with Porsche or the automotive dealership. The work is presented as a unique interpretation of Porsche and stands alone as an art installation.

COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS:

The 2013 Public Art Master Plan builds on the City's strong visual arts heritage, acknowledges the value of existing public art projects, and focuses on how artists can continue to enhance the public realm. The proposed onsite public artwork promotes the following specific policies from the Plan:

- Policy 4: Employ public art to promote a more walkable city.
- Policy 7: Refine the Public Art in Private Development Program to contribute affirmatively to Pasadena's cultural and economic health.

The 2015 General Plan Land Use Element includes Goal #9 on Public Art. Specifically, it identifies public art as an integral part of the City, reinforcing its visual character, responding to urban design initiatives and promoting dialogue across ethnic and generational lines. The proposed onsite public artwork promotes the following policies:

- Policy 9.2: Embrace public art as a citywide urban beautification effort.
- Policy 9.6: Public art in private development to more actively contribute to Pasadena's cultural identity and reinforce the City's urban design principles.

CONCLUSION:

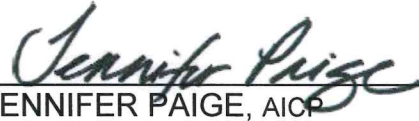
Staff finds that the proposed Artist has demonstrated the ability to implement a site-responsive artwork, and the Concept Art Plan has the capacity to provide an engaging experience for residents and visitors, with a visually striking aesthetic that would complement the building's design, function, and surrounding landscape. The artwork is in conformance with the Guidelines and Public Art Master Plan which supports the incorporation and integration of civic art into private development to enhance community

character, reinforce local identity, highlight qualities of place and assist visitor orientation. If the Council approves the Artist and Concept Art Plan, the Applicant will continue to refine the proposed artwork and submit the Final Art Plan, which will be reviewed by the Arts & Culture Commission.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The on-site artwork will contribute to the redevelopment and improvement of an underutilized site which will generate revenue to the City.

Respectfully submitted,



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Attachments (5):

- Attachment A – Findings for Approval.
- Attachment B – Conditions of Approval.
- Attachment C – April 9, 2025 Arts and Culture Commission Staff Report (without attachments).
- Attachment D – Concept Art Plan.
- Attachment E – Private Development Public Art Program Guidelines.