

CRISTIN TIERNEY



Council OKs art projects

BY SCHNARR, J.W. ON MARCH 20, 2018.

The City has given a greenlight to two public art projects for the ATB Centre Phase 2.

The Galleria and Gymnasium will feature a colourful art installation called "The Ball is in Your Court" by Toronto artists Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins, and comes at a cost of \$126,000.

The Aquatic Centre installation, featuring water droplets on a blurred background, is called "Near and Far" by Calgary artist Derek Besant, and will cost \$100,000.

The motion to accept the projects passed by majority vote with Coun. Joe Mauro the lone holdout during Monday's regular Council meeting.

Mauro said while he appreciated the importance of public art, he questioned the amount of money being spent when there were other areas the money could be spent.

"Art is great, and it's good, and I support it," he said. "But if I look at it from my own personal point of view, art is something that you kind of buy when you have a little bit of extra money. It's not money I believe we should be dedicating.

"I don't like the amount of money we're putting into it."

Coun. Rob Miyashiro countered by saying it was important for Council to think about how they wanted the city to look and function.

"If we looked at it from a purely functional aspect for everything we built and developed, Lethbridge would look like Soviet block construction from the 1950s," he said. "Everything was functional, and square, and ran in straight lines.

"And no one liked it."

Suzanne Lint, Chair for the City of Lethbridge Public Art Project Commissioning Committee, said the selection committee made the decision to go with Besant's work independent of the controversy surrounding the Calgary artist.

In November last year, Besant was accused of violating the copyrights of some British photographers after he admitted to using the promotional photographs of some British comedians in a public art installation called SNAPSHOTS, located in an underpass in downtown Calgary. Besant received \$20,000 in public funds for the temporary installation.

He apologized for the incident and has said it occurred due to his confusion over the copyright status of the images.

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“The committee was aware of the controversy (Besant) has found himself in recently,” Lint said. “None of those concerns exist with the piece that was selected – which includes water images that are his.”

Due to the size of the ATB building, Lint said there is a large public art budget for the facility. This means the Centre could see more public art coming its way.

“There will be a project engaged around the Sports Hall of Fame,” she said.

“And there are other opportunities in the master plan that may be realized down the road.”

Lint said while the focus in public art discussions often revolves around money, the framework for the discussion is different than when art is purchased by members of the public.

“Public art pieces are large, constructed pieces that have very specific and strident requirements in order to be safe, durable, and to stand the test of time,” she said.

She said artists who do public installation pieces are often involved in engineering, accessing commercial-grade materials.

“I liken it to a small-scale construction project,” she said. “Rather than a painting. And that’s partially why the costs are so high.”

Lint said the purpose of the art is to add to the atmosphere and enhance the vibrancy of the space.