



DATE: June 2, 2025

TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council

VIA: Stefan Chatwin, City Manager  
Marlene Subhashini, Assistant City Manager

FROM: Derek Schweigart, Parks and Recreation Director  
Tiffany Oren, Recreation Manager

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE UTILITY BOX ART PILOT PROGRAM  
IMPLEMENTATION

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### RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council, by Minute Order, receive and accept the update on the Utility Box Art Pilot Program.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Foster City Utility Box Art Pilot Program (“Pilot Program” or “Program”) was authorized by the City Council on March 18, 2024, via City Resolution No. 2024-16. Developed in response to increasing incidents of vandalism on City-owned utility boxes, the program was a collaborative effort between the Foster City Police Department (FCPD) and Parks and Recreation Department, drawing inspiration from similar successful initiatives in neighboring communities. This Program initiative aims to transform utility boxes into vibrant works of public art that enhance the visual appeal of the city, foster community pride, and help deter vandalism through creative expression.

Following City Council approval, staff issued a Call for Artists from September 1 through December 31, 2024. Fifteen artists submitted a total of 23 designs. A selection committee reviewed all submissions and presented their top four (4) recommended designs to the Parks and Recreation Committee at its May 6, 2025 meeting.

If deemed successful, the Utility Box Art Pilot Program could be expanded and adopted as an ongoing initiative. Additional funding would be required in future budgets to support continued implementation by making the Pilot Program a permanent one.

Staff is seeking City Council's acceptance of the program update at the June 2, 2025 Council meeting, and will come back at a future meeting to request direction regarding the potential continuation of the Utility Box Art Pilot Program beyond the pilot phase.

## **BACKGROUND**

On March 18, 2024, the City Council authorized the Utility Box Art Pilot Program via City Resolution No. 2024-16. The Pilot Program was developed in 2023 as a joint effort between the FCPD and Parks and Recreation Department in response to an increase in vandalism on City-owned utility boxes. Inspired by similar initiatives in neighboring communities, the Program is intended to deter vandalism while enhancing the visual appeal of public spaces. Per City Council direction at its March 18, 2024 meeting, selection of the artwork associated with the Pilot Program was subject to review and approval by City staff and the Parks and Recreation Committee only. Staff was to return to City Council at a later date to provide an update on the Pilot Program and to seek further direction on whether the Program should continue.

This Pilot Program aims to transform utility boxes into vibrant, community-driven art installations. Through creative expression, the project seeks to beautify the City, foster local pride, and incorporate crime prevention strategies. The primary objectives include:

**Beautification and Vibrancy:** Enriching public spaces with unique, visually engaging artwork.

**Community Pride:** Showcasing local artistic talent and celebrating Foster City's culture and identity.

**Crime Reduction:** Utilizing Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, as decorated utility boxes have been shown to deter graffiti and vandalism.

The pilot phase focuses on four high-visibility traffic signal utility boxes to maximize public exposure and gather community feedback. Selected locations include:

- E. Hillsdale Blvd. @ Gull Ave.
- Metro Center Blvd. @ Edgewater Blvd.
- Foster City Blvd. @ Polynesia Dr.
- Port Royal Ave. @ Edgewater Blvd. (north end)

Artwork will be applied using either paint or vinyl wrap, and each piece will be sealed with an anti-graffiti clear coat to ensure durability and ease of maintenance.

## ANALYSIS

Following City Council approval of the Utility Box Art Pilot Program on March 18, 2024, staff issued a Call for Artists through the City's website. The application period was open from September 1, 2024, through December 31, 2024. During that time, fifteen (15) artists submitted a total of 23 original designs.

Submissions were reviewed and scored by a Selection Committee comprised of City staff and two (2) members of the Parks and Recreation Citizens Advisory Committee. Each design was evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Design & Creative Elements:** Does the design demonstrate unique artistic vision and creativity? Is it an original concept rather than a replication of existing work?
- **Artistic Quality & Execution:** Are the artistic elements well executed? Does the design showcase skill and effort?
- **Relevance to Foster City/Community Connection:** Does the design align with and reflect the city? Does it foster a sense of pride or belonging within the community?
- **Visual Impact:** Does the design catch the viewer's attention? Is it engaging and aesthetically pleasing from a distance and up close?
- **Suitability for Public Display:** Is the content appropriate for all ages and inclusive of the community? Does it enhance the surroundings without being disruptive or controversial?

At the March 18, 2024 City Council meeting, Council provided direction to have the Parks and Recreation Committee provide final approval on the utility box artwork selection in order to expedite the process. At its May 6, 2025 meeting, the Parks and Recreation Committee reviewed and accepted the four (4) highest scored submissions recommended by the Selection Committee. The final artwork selections are attached to this report for the City Council's reference.

Staff notified the selected artists and plan to hold an Artist Orientation in the next month, which will cover the next steps including art installation process, signing of artist waivers, and stipend. Art installation is estimated to take place between June-August 2025.

## California Environmental Quality Act

This pilot program is not subject to review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21000, et seq. and the CEQA Guidelines (14 Cal. Code Regs. §§ 15000 et. seq.), including without limitation, Public Resources Code section 21065 and California Code of Regulations 15378 as this is not a “project” that may cause a direct, or reasonably foreseeable indirect, physical change in the environment and if a “project,” is exempt under the “common sense” exception (14 Cal. Code Regs. § 15061(b)(3)) because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that this action may have a significant effect on the environment.

## FISCAL IMPACT

The original cost estimate for the pilot program was \$13,704, which covered artist stipends, vinyl wrapping, and materials. The Foster City Foundation – Art and Culture Fund contributed \$5,485.98, with the remaining \$8,218.02 funded through the Community Benefit Fund.

Artist stipends are determined by the selected installation method:

- Painted boxes: \$500 for standard traffic boxes, \$300 for pedestal boxes.
  - Vinyl-wrapped boxes: \$300 for standard traffic boxes, \$100 for pedestal boxes.
- The estimated vendor cost to vinyl-wrap a standard utility box is \$2,800 per box.

For the pilot phase, two utility boxes will be hand-painted and two will be vinyl-wrapped. No pedestal boxes are included in this phase, resulting in a total artist stipend payout of **\$1,600**. The estimated cost for a vendor to apply the vinyl wraps is **\$7,591.44**. Combined, the total cost for the pilot program is **\$9,191.44**.

If the City Council determines the Pilot Program to be successful and chooses to continue it into future years, funding will need to be allocated as part of the annual budget process and/or identified from other sources including donations and sponsorships to support the expansion to additional utility boxes.

## CITY COUNCIL VISION, MISSION, AND VALUE/PRIORITY AREA

Innovation

## ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1 – Utility Art Box Update Presentation