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MEDFORD

I-5 viaduct pillars will get splash of color

The Medford Arts Commission has formed selection committee to consider ideas to put art or lights on the gray columns.



COMMENT



For 50 years, the gray pillars supporting the viaduct have been a stark reminder of how the freeway cuts the city of Medford in two.

City officials are moving forward with an idea to decorate the pillars with murals and lights to brighten up the section to the west of Hawthorne Park next to Bear Creek.

"This is ugly compared to that idea," said Ed Stone, a 59-year-old Medford man walking his dog China through the park on Monday. "I would think that would be an improvement."

Stone said he would like to see something added to the pillars to make them more appealing.

The Medford Arts Commission has formed a selection committee that will look at proposals from various artists to beautify the pillars.

"We just want to brighten it up and make it more friendly," said Elizabeth Bunn, an arts committee member who also will be on the selection committee. "We would like it to be a little more beautiful than it is now."

Bunn said the city has a public process that it uses to help determine what artwork is appropriate for the pillars. The city will collaborate with an artist to determine the best method to make the pillars more attractive.

Clay Bearnson, who is chairman of the Arts Commission, said the proposal is still in its infancy, but the Oregon Department of Transportation has given the city the green light to seek an appropriate art installation for the pillars.

He said the most expensive portion of the project could be the lighting, including possibly solar-powered lights.

The city has set aside \$50,000 for the art project, which includes a \$25,000 grant from the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians.

Only about a dozen of the many pillars along Hawthorne Park would be decorated. Bearnson said he thought the pillars closest to the park would be decorated, but not the ones closer to the creek.

Medford officials will soon begin a \$1.65 million redesign of Hawthorne Park, which has been plagued by crime and vagrancy issues over the years. The remodel should be completed by next year. The Arts Commission hopes to have the murals completed at the time the park reopens.

The plan includes a spray pad, basketball courts, artwork and two dog parks — one each for small and large dogs.

New walkways would be built throughout the park, along with new lighting and a new restroom, which should be installed this summer.

Steve Brammer, a 60-year-old Medford cyclist who rides through the park a lot, said he liked the idea of adorning the pillars with murals.

"That would be beautiful," he said. "Murals would add color and vitality along here."

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