



# Memorandum

**TO:** PUBLIC ART COMMITTEE

**FROM:** Michael Ogilvie

**SUBJECT:** SEE BELOW

**DATE:** March 27 2024

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**Council District: 3**

**SUBJECT:** The San José Walls 2024 workplan for a mural to be created and maintained on City property in designated locations along the Guadalupe River Park and Trail within the jurisdiction of the Guadalupe River Park Conservancy to include a new artwork project by Taki Kitamura

## RECOMMENDATION

Review and take action to approve San José Walls 2024 workplan for projects along the Guadalupe River Park and Trails in locations within the jurisdiction of the Guadalupe River Park Conservancy, to include a design development proposal for new mural artwork by San José artist Taki Kitamura. (Not a City of San José Public Art Program project.)

**DATE OF ARTIST SELECTION:** Winter 2023-2024 through a curatorial format. Artist selected is local.

**BUDGET:** Not a City-funded project

**LOCATION:** Along City's Guadalupe River Park Trail, designated locations within the jurisdiction of the Guadalupe River Park Conservancy including a site along the trail from Woz Way to the Hwy. 280 underpass.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

San José Walls (SJW), previously known as POW! WOW! San José, was established in 2017; it is Northern California's regional branch of the Worldwide Walls network of festivals happening in over 20 cities around the world. SJW is led locally by the Empire Seven Studios collective — a contemporary urban art gallery and cultural institution in San José's Japantown District.

In recent years, SJW has grown into a premiere Bay Area art festival. Much more than a multi-day festival, SJW is an entity with substantial economic and community impact and is also a vehicle to celebrate San José's past, present, and future creative culture. To date, SJW has produced over 80 murals and art installations throughout the City with a focus on underserved neighborhoods and most recently, the Guadalupe River Park and Trails. SJW's goal is to strengthen community ties by bringing local and worldwide contemporary art to our City as a way to highlight its rich diversity.

SJW works in close collaboration with the Guadalupe River Park Conservancy (GRPC) in the creation of murals along the Guadalupe River Trail, in locations adjacent to downtown San José. The GRPC provides community leadership for the development and active use of the Guadalupe River

Park & Gardens through education, advocacy, and stewardship. A true gem of San José, the Conservancy is visited by more than 400,000 visitors annually. A major asset within the Conservancy is the Guadalupe River Park and Trail. This three-mile ribbon of parkland runs along the banks of the Guadalupe River in the heart of downtown San José. Through their ongoing collaboration, SJW and GRPC continue to work to enhance natural spaces with public art murals, with the shared objective of improving the quality of life in the community. Their shared vision is to create the longest continued art corridor in the Bay Area.

For 2024, SJW plans to expand the Art Walk with a major mural along the Guadalupe River Trail from Woz Way to the Highway 280 underpass, a distance of 120' long. It will be created by artist Taki Kitamura and titled *Serpentine Fire*. *Serpentine Fire* represents dragon mythology around the world. As described by the artist, "*Serpentine Fire*" celebrates this lunar year of the dragon and the multiculturalism of San Jose.

With his background as a tattoo artist, he is versed in depicting visual mythology and is part of a larger tradition of storytellers. With this mural, he is expressing the diversity of serpent divinity and sacred spaces - the dragon and serpent have been symbolic in cultures all over the world and in this, he sees our common humanity. From the Woz Way starting point, imagery in the mural design includes torii gates which open the mural and are reminiscent of the famed Fushimi Inari Shinto shrine in Kyoto; a Japanese dragon rises above. Quetzalcoatl, the great Aztec feathered serpent, glides through the air behind serpent shadows casted on Chichen Itza pyramid at the spring equinox. And in reference to Peru, a serpent is inscribed with the Nazca line from thousands of years ago. Continuing southward, a Dragon dance and firecrackers bring in the Lunar New year in Asia. Then, in Greek and European mythology, the Serpens constellation graces the heavens - one of the most sacred spaces of all. And at the Highway 280 underpass, the artwork closes with the Naga of India, the origin of most Asian dragon mythology.

Taki Kitamura is an acclaimed Japanese-American tattoo artist who apprenticed under the famed Japanese tattoo master, Horiyoshi III and counts American tattoo pioneer Ed Hardy as a mentor. His business, State of Grace Tattoo, was founded by Taki Kitamura in September of 2002; it has been located in San José's Japantown since 2009. In addition to a fulltime tattoo schedule, Taki has been involved in publishing, museum exhibitions, lectures, art shows, murals and Horitomo's lifestyle brand: Monmon Cats.

Having already completed multiple projects within the GRPC, this project will continue to accomplish the SJW goal to increase the number of installations within the existing SJW footprint to enhance the visitor experience.

In addition to this new artwork project, as part of its ongoing work, SJW also intends to continue restoration work on its existing projects where needed. Approval of this recommendation is with the understanding by SJW and the GRPC that, for the life of the murals, all maintenance and repair of the murals is entirely the responsibility of SJW and the GRPC and will not be the responsibility of the City of San José or its Public Art Program.

SJW and GPRC have multiple partnerships to support ongoing maintenance of the Art Walk. These include Beautify SJ, SJ Conservation/Resilience Corps, and Groundwerx. Each of these organizations provides support to help keep existing installations clean and to prep future installation sites to ensure

a successful application. Additionally, they have increased the application of anti-graffiti clear coating from four coats to six coats and have created a new subdivision within the GRPC's existing volunteer programming to focus specifically on graffiti removal. This group is called the "Tag Team." For each piece on the Art Walk there is a line item in GRPC's annual budget specifically for maintenance costs. Their shared goal is to continue to develop an improved and sustainable ongoing maintenance plan for public art along the trail.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

The visioning and development of the plan for the Guadalupe River Trail Art Walk is the result of planning done over time by GRPC and SJW, at the outset of the project. This planning work was done in coordination with the District 3 Council Office and included extensive online survey work by GRPC seeking feedback about Guadalupe River Park and the type of art people would like to see along the trail – there were 70 participants in that effort. There was also a community engagement forum hosted in conjunction with Children's Discovery Museum (the site adjacent to the first mural in the art walk); 45 people participated in that forum which included polls and survey questions.

GRPC and SJ Walls 2024 has coordinated this 2024 plan with the City's Department of Parks, Recreations and Neighborhood Services and with Valley Water.

/s/

MICHAEL OGILVIE,  
Public Art Director