

# The Seattle Times

## Crews wash away coat of gray from mural near zoo

A brightly colored mural in Phinney Ridge that depicts zoo animals is being restored this week after city crews in May mistakenly painted over it.



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As Ryan McCoy applies a special spray wash, a mural re-emerges, rooster and all, on the wall of an underpass below Phinney Avenue North at North 57th Street. Gray paint was applied over the mural after it was tagged with graffiti, but work to uncover the artwork will continue in the coming

**By Arla Shephard**

*Seattle Times staff reporter*

July 8, 2008.

Delighted neighbors were giving thumbs-up as brightly colored zoo animals began to reappear from under a coat of mistakenly applied gray paint — a goof city officials said would not be made again.

"We've all learned from this," said Jim Bennett, Woodland Park Zoo's community-relations manager. "The city's learned, we've learned and the neighbors have learned; and it's brought us together to hopefully get it fixed, and hopefully this won't happen again."

Crews using a nonchemical-spray-washing method will be working through Thursday to restore the 50-foot mural, in an underpass of Phinney Avenue North at North 57th Street, near the zoo's west entrance. The city painted over the entire mural in May after one neighbor, Greg Zuhl, made several calls to the city's graffiti hotline reporting that portions of it had been tagged.

"We never intended for the mural to be painted over," said Rick Sheridan, spokesman for Seattle's Department of Transportation. "The city recognizes that the mural was important to the fabric of the community."

Bringing the animals back to life is now costing the city \$5,000.

Sheridan said the city is looking for a group or individual who will take responsibility for safeguarding and maintaining the mural.

"The way murals are treated, the owners have to agree to upkeep the mural at their own costs," he said. "That's part of the agreement they sign asking for a permit."

The original permit holders are long gone, he said. Though the mural is near zoo property, Woodland Park Zoo is not responsible for it, Bennett said, though in the past the zoo has helped neighbors cover up graffiti tags.

Zuhl said when he asked the city utilities department to explain why the entire mural was wiped out, he got a bureaucratic answer — and no apology.

"I couldn't believe it," he said. "These were giant zoo animals, and the zoo's 20 yards away. ... It was idiotic what happened. I don't know how else to say it."

The mural was created in 1994, through a project that involved hundreds of neighbors, a \$2,000 city grant and the now-defunct Street Smart Art program, which sought to channel the artistic urges of young people into positive displays.

"It converted what was a pretty dark, dismal underpass into a work of art," said Irene Wall, president of the Phinney Ridge Community Council.

The patented spray-washing method crews are using on the mural this week uses volcanic crystal and low air pressure to "etch away" the gray paint, preserving the original mural underneath, said Cassidi Soule, marketing manager of Surface Cleaning Technologies, LLC.

Zuhl is surprised at the outpouring of support from neighbors and other Seattle residents eager to help in the restoration.

"I totally love that about Seattle," Zuhl said. "People could really relate to this story."

Zuhl hopes that out of this experience, something positive will arise.

"I hope that neighborhoods will come up with a plan that will help them paint out graffiti and protect the integrity of their neighborhood," he said. "I'd hate to see this happen again."

*Arla Shephard: 206-515-5632 or [ashephard@seattletimes.com](mailto:ashephard@seattletimes.com)*