GRAND RIVER GREENWAY PUBLIC ART PLAN

RIVERSIDE PARK TO MILLENNIUM PARK

Exceptional public art is essential to realizing the Grand River Corridor's full potential as an inviting, welcoming and active public space.

With the pace of river corridor revitalization accelerating, greater Grand Rapids now stands at a pivotal juncture to intentionally integrate art and culture strategies into the broader movement.

The community can ensure that artistic expression and cultural storytelling become core elements of the river transformation - shaping not only how the corridor looks but also how it feels and functions as a place people want to be.

The Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan envisions a vibrant corridor - accessible to all - where quality art in its many forms plays a central role enhancing the character of the waterway and the community around it through history, culture and creativity.

By continuing to integrate both local and global artistic perspectives, this plan seeks to further establish the urban reach of the Grand River Corridor - from Riverside Park to Millennium Park - as a shared civic and cultural space.

Building on the community's strong legacy of public art, this plan provides a framework for the expansion of art and cultural expression along the river corridor.

Through intentional integration of new and existing works, the corridor can offer an attractive, immersive and inspiring experience that reinforces Grand Rapids' reputation as a leader in public art and placemaking.

Community Priorities (Informing Recommendations)

- Exceptional art that inspires pride, sparks creativity and reflects the ambitions of the community
- Celebration of the rich culural tapestry and heritage of Grand Rapids, especially Indigenous voices.
- Ensure strategic distribution of artworks through the river corridor.
- Pieces that include educational, interactive, and environmental themes.
- Collaboration with artists, institutions, and neighborhoods to strengthen the arts ecosystem.

Top Recommendations

1. Establish a Unified Public Art Leadership Model.
2. Implement a Sustainable Funding Strategy.
3. Broaden Community Voice in the Riverfront Public Art Process.
4. Develop a Long-Term Maintenance and Conservation Plan.
5. Foster Local Artistic Development Through Strategic Partnerships.

Public Art Placement Strategy

Overall Goal:

Transform the riverfront into a dynamic and welcoming cultural destination through thoughtful placement and curation, reinforcing Grand Rapids as a national leader in creative placemaking.

Key Elements:

- Blend permanent legacy pieces with dynamic, rotating artworks.
- Use durable, weather-resistant materials to endure Michigan's climate and reduce long-term maintenance.
- Strategically place artworks in high-visibility, underused, or transitional spaces.
- Incorporate harmonious curatorial elements (themes, materials, signage) to create an excellent riverfront experience.
- Showcase both local and international artists to create vibrant and high-quality art.
- Design artworks that invite interaction, reflection, and storytelling — supporting community voice, environmental awareness, and cultural celebration.

Near Term Implementation Priorities

1. Operationalize DGRI as the interim manager of the Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan.
2. Create the Grand River Artworks Committee: recruit members, define roles, secure City/County agreement.
3. Develop a long-term fundraising plan that engages foundations, corporations, and public agengies as key partners in implementation.
4. Staffing: Hire or contract a Public Art Curator to oversee artworks procurement. Hire or contract with a development professional to support implementatio of funding strategy.
5. Launch Pilot Artworks: 5–6 temporary installations to build momentum, test logistics, educate the public and attract funders.
6. Begin Fundraising and Outreach: Initiate First RFQs for 2–3 priority permanent installation sites.

To read the full plan:

DOWNTOWN GRAND RAPIDS INC.

The development of the Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan has been a collaborative effort shaped by the expertise, vision and dedication of numerous individuals and organizations. Their contributions have been instrumental in crafting a plan that reflects the culture, history and aspirations of the Grand Rapids community.

