

GRAND RIVER GREENWAY
PUBLIC ART PLAN
RIVERSIDE PARK TO MILLENNIUM PARK
FINAL DRAFT 2025



DOWNTOWN
GRAND RAPIDS INC.

“That river has a spirit. It is over 11,000 years old and when that river first formed from the glacier deposits, it started making a sound, an energy and hum. That river has never been quiet for over 11,000 years. If you stick your finger in the river, you are connecting to the ocean. You are connecting to the rest of the world. There is a bond that connects right there. I was raised by this river. The rapids are the reason we are here.”

– Chief, Chairman and Ogema, Ron Yob
Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians



**GRAND RIVER BANDS
OF OTTAWA INDIANS**

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Acknowledgements

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 aspirations and stories of the Grand Rapids community.

Steering Committee

The values, principles and overall spirit of this plan are the direct result of thoughtful and dedicated guidance from the Steering Committee. Their leadership and commitment to this process are deeply appreciated.

Thanks to their hard work and input, future art in the public realm along the Grand River will reflect the welcoming, dynamic and creative spirit of our region.

Steering Committee Members

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Cultural Planning Group

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Beyond the Steering Committee, we recognize the invaluable contributions of a broad network of community partners and individuals whose support has been critical in shaping this plan.

Arts Community: A special thank you to local artists, galleries, cultural organizations and arts advocates whose creativity and vision have helped shape the future of art along the Grand River.

Arts and Culture Collective of Grand Rapids: Thank you for your leadership towards a well-supported and well-connected arts and culture community.

City of Grand Rapids Arts Advisory Committee and Staff: Your expertise and dedication have been essential to the development and implementation of this plan.

Design Leaders: Thank you for your technical expertise and creative approaches in designing a compelling and sustainable riverfront experience.

Elected Officials: We appreciate the leadership and guidance of our City and County representatives in championing this initiative.

Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority: We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority for funding this planning process and for their continued support of public art in Downtown Grand Rapids.

Grand River Network: Thank you for your work to make our community's vision for the river come to fruition.

Indigenous Community: We are deeply grateful to local tribal representatives, artists, educators and cultural leaders who have shared their invaluable perspectives and advocated for the integration of Indigenous narratives into the public art plan.

Philanthropic Organizations and Donors: We deeply appreciate the support of foundations and donors who recognize the transformative power of public art in shaping communities.

Property Owners: Your engagement and support in exploring ways to integrate art into riverfront spaces are greatly appreciated.

Tourism and Economic Development Leaders: Thank you for your role in envisioning a vibrant and accessible riverfront that attracts visitors and stimulates the local economy.

Preamble

The Grand River and public art are integral to our identity in Grand Rapids, fostering pride in both our heritage and aspirations for the future. We believe these elements can be more deeply interconnected to elevate and enrich our community's vision for a vibrant and welcoming River for All.

We are confident that exceptional and purposeful public art along the river, in its many forms, will stir interest, spark wonder and imagination and help draw people to the river's edge. High-quality, meaningful art is also a powerful tool to honor the stories that shape our community's past and future, and strengthen our connection to place.

The banks of the Grand River are the ancestral homeland of the Peoples of the Three Fires: the Ojibwe (Chippewa), Odawa (Ottawa), Bodewadmi (Potawatomi). We express our gratitude and respect to the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians and other Anishinaabe tribes for their lasting presence in our community and for the wisdom they share in teaching us to honor the earth and one another.

This area is the tribal homeland of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians. We would like to give thanks to Chief, Chairman and Ogema, Ron Yob, for his persistent work, advocacy and dedication to protecting these lands and histories.

Our hope is that public art along the river offers an opportunity to share authentic Indigenous stories about the physical and cultural displacement of our Anishinaabe neighbors. But it also must be a vehicle to reaffirm the enduring presence, culture and contributions of the Anishinaabe people in this place.

Rooted in the histories and voices unique to our river corridor, this approach also can help shape a public art collection that is distinctive to West Michigan – deeply connected to the land, the water and the people who have long called this place home.

In this spirit, our original intention was to title this public art plan after the Grand River's original name as a small gesture of respect. However, through extensive conversations with Anishinaabe community members, we discovered that the river is known by many names. It is most commonly called "Owashtanong" (long flowing waters), but it is also referred to by more literal Anishinaabe translations, such as "Gitchi-Zibi" (Big River). We choose to refer to the river throughout this plan by its modern name, the Grand River.

We are committed to learning and building deeper relationships to better understand, represent and support Anishinaabe culture along the Grand River Greenway.

This plan is a direct response to the Steering Committee's desire and the public's call to expand the stories told and the artwork displayed. In addition to honoring the history of this place, the plan and subsequent art in the public realm will look to the future with ambition, optimism and community pride.

There is already significant community interest and generational reinvestment underway in the river corridor. Now is the time to transform these community values into action, ensuring that public art remains an integral part of our City and riverfront for years to come.

Sincerely,

Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan Steering Committee

Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. Project Team

A hand holding a stack of colorful books. The hand is on the left, and the books are on the right, stacked vertically. The books have various colored spines, including red, orange, yellow, green, and blue. The background is dark blue with a subtle grid pattern.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Plan Overview

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

What We Heard

Recommendations and Next Steps

Plan Overview

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

We know from numerous beloved local examples - *La Grand Vitesse*, *Ecliptic* and Meijer Gardens, among others - that **art is a powerful tool** to encourage reflection, stir imagination and create distinct places that draw people to gather, explore and enjoy.

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.

Through proactive planning and collaboration, 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 as a shared civic and cultural space**. Riverside and Millennium Parks, situated at the north and south ends of Grand Rapids' urban core, serve as significant bookends for the focused and intentional public art program envisioned in this plan, elevating the river's role as both a natural and cultural asset.

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.**

Guiding Principles

The project steering committee drafted the following guiding principles to inform the development of this plan and the future public art program. The principles are intended to serve the broader community—not any one organization.



Artistic Excellence and Innovation

Cultivate a sophisticated, forward-thinking collection that surprises, inspires and invites moments of curiosity and wonder in the rhythm of everyday life.



Civic Engagement

Involve residents in planning for public art to reflect shared values, civic pride and the history and stories of the community.



Accessibility and Belonging

Ensure the Grand River is welcoming to all through universal design and showcasing a wide variety of artists and mediums.



Context and Sustainability

Place and maintain artworks that are environmentally conscious, durable and thoughtfully integrated in the surrounding landscape.

Key Objectives



Place Identity and Connection

Public art will anchor the Greenway's parks, trails and urban spaces to create a distinct and memorable cultural corridor.



Enhanced Riverfront Experience

Activate 230 acres of public space and integrate permanent works with festivals, performances and year-round opportunities for community engagement.



Local Roots, Global Reach

Celebrate local stories while welcoming global perspectives - positioning the river corridor as a cultural destination with both hometown character and international appeal.



Strategic Partnerships

Collaboration with public, private and nonprofit partners will drive investment, curation and long-term maintenance.



Curated Expansion of Public Art

Develop a collection of diverse works - sculptural, mural, interactive, digital - across at least 20 priority sites along the corridor to create a connected visual and cultural experience.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Community engagement has been central to the development of the Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan, ensuring that it reflects the many voices, histories and aspirations of Grand Rapids. This section outlines the engagement process, key themes and insights gathered from the community and the challenges identified through public input.

Summary of Engagement Process

The Community Engagement Plan was designed to ensure that the public art plan aligns with shared values and priorities. The planning team collaborated with a Steering Committee to guide the development of the engagement process, building awareness of the current public art collection, its cultural significance and future opportunities.

Engagement Strategies & Outcomes

- **Research and Prior Planning Review:** Ensured alignment with existing community plans and identified key gaps.
 - » 9 plans, with total of over 15,000 participants
- **Focus Groups, Interviews and Online Surveys:** Elicited input on priority locations, themes and narratives.
 - » 192 participants
- **Public Events:** Facilitated conversations and creative activities to involve residents in the planning process.
 - » 200 participants

Informed Strategies For

- **Curatorial Principles** for artist selection and artwork themes.
- **Site Planning & Evaluation** to identify potential art locations along the Greenway.
- **Public Art Programming** guidance to foster an inspirational cultural corridor.



Indigenous Engagement

The plan prioritizes deep collaboration with Anishinaabe leaders and tribal community members to ensure respectful representation and protection of sacred sites.

What We Heard

Opportunities



Collaborations – Partnerships help ensure public art is authentic, welcoming and sustainable, reflecting community voices and narratives while building shared-ownership and long-term support.



Community Engagement – Involving residents in the planning and creation of public art fosters local pride, ownership and alignment with community values.



Cultural Reflection and Belonging – Public art presents unique opportunities to honor the rich cultural tapestry of Grand Rapids. Thoughtful curation and community partnerships will celebrate local heritage and narratives.



Economic Benefits – When done well, public art can attract visitors, support local businesses and catalyze new investment, reinforcing Grand Rapids as a cultural destination while creating opportunities in the creative sector and beyond.



Exceptional Art – Grand Rapiadians value great art - work that inspires pride, sparks creativity and reflects the creativity and ambition of the community.



Educational Value – Integrating interpretive and interactive elements into artworks will deepen public understanding of local history, cultural heritage and environmental stewardship.



Strategic Placement – Positioning art in both high-traffic areas and quieter areas will broaden access and distribute cultural experiences throughout the corridor. Gateway installations can serve as welcoming landmarks that strengthen neighborhood identity.



Sustainability – Using eco-friendly materials and design practices will align public art with broader environmental goals, promoting long-term resilience.

The Challenges That We Must Address

Broad-Based Engagement

– Supporting meaningful participation from all communities requires sustained outreach, an approachable, accessible process and transparent decision-making.

Creativity & Community – The program must balance artistic excellence with community priorities, ensuring the collection reflects diverse voices while maintaining a clear and harmonious theme across installations.

Funding – Sustainable funding remains a primary challenge, requiring mechanisms to support existing installations, new projects and long-term maintenance.

Historical Awareness – Ensuring accurate representation of all cultural traditions and identities requires genuine relationships and safeguards against inappropriate preference and misrepresentation.

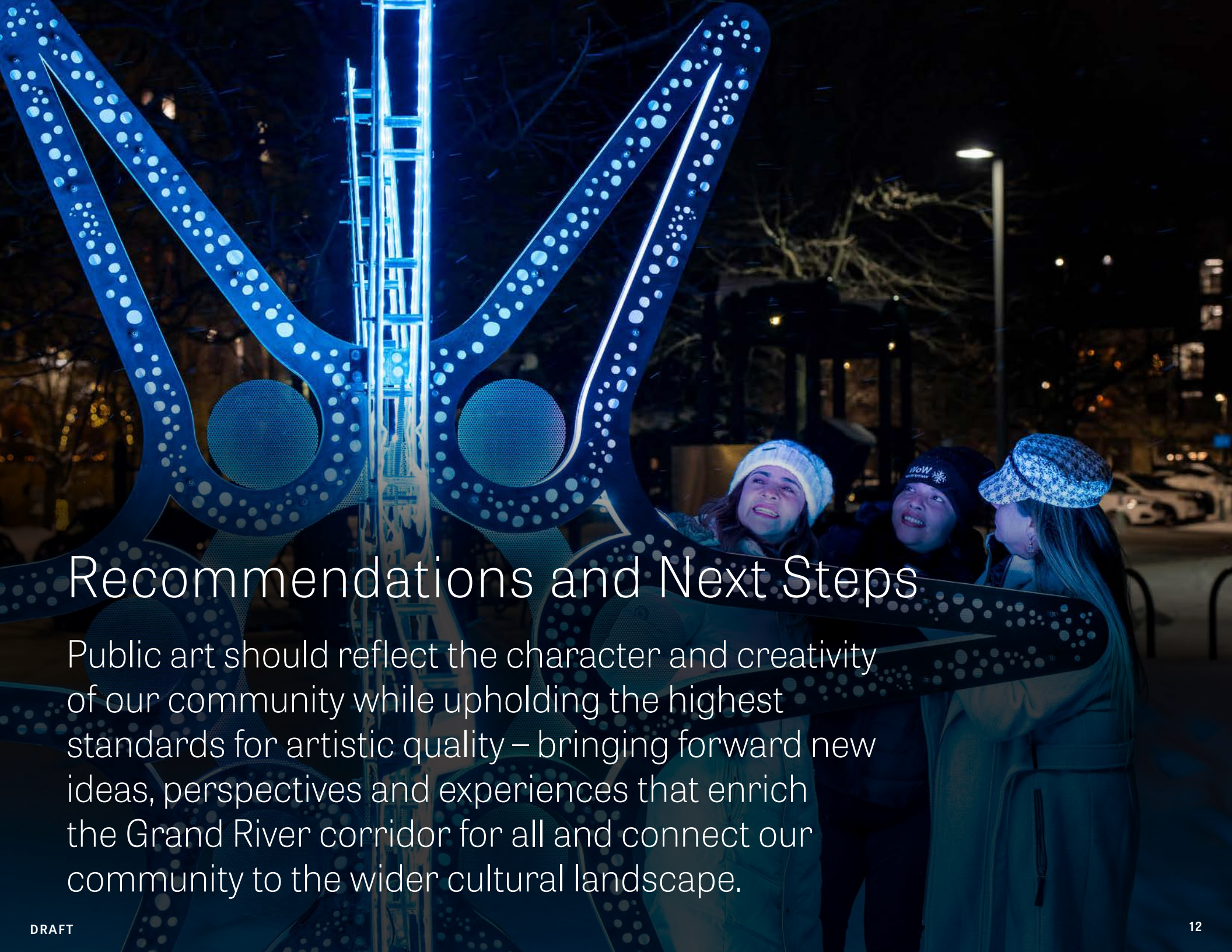
Maintaining/Conserving – A long-term strategy is needed to guide the ongoing care, preservation and accessibility of public art across the corridor.

Operational and Logistical Barriers – Navigating permitting, regulatory constraints and funding allocations requires clear roles, responsibilities and streamlined processes.

Public Awareness and Education – Expanding education about art currently in the collection, where it is and what it means can build public understanding and support for expanded arts efforts.

Stakeholder Coordination – Aligning City departments, County agencies, nonprofits and developers is essential to effectively address many of the challenges detailed here.





Recommendations and Next Steps

Public art should reflect the character and creativity of our community while upholding the highest standards for artistic quality – bringing forward new ideas, perspectives and experiences that enrich the Grand River corridor for all and connect our community to the wider cultural landscape.

1. Establish a Unified Public Art Leadership Model for the River

Solution:

- **Form a Grand River Artworks Committee** to serve as the community voice intentionally focused on overseeing curation, funding, implementation and maintenance of art in the public realm along the riverfront.
- Select members based on community **representation and specific, relevant expertise**.
- **Appoint a qualified curator** or curatorial team to guide artist selection, ensure artistic quality and nurture a harmonious vision for the river corridor's public art program.

- **Strengthen coordination and partnership** among the City, County, developers and community organizations.

Outcome:

- A collaborative structure to effectively coordinate public art consistently across the river corridor.
- **Promotes community-centered** decision-making and strategic alignment of public art efforts.



2. Broaden Community Voice in the Riverfront Public Art Process

Solution:

- **Expand public participation opportunities** alongside art and design professionals when evaluating riverfront sites, artist and art selection, design and storytelling.
- **Host early-stage listening sessions** and project workshops so residents can share local stories, ideas and priorities before artist selection.
- **Improve public feedback mechanisms** to support ongoing dialogue between artists, stakeholders and the community.
- **Develop educational initiatives** focusing on the quality of art in the public realm, environmental sustainability, cultural heritage and placemaking.
- Continue to deepen **Indigenous partnerships and relationships** to ensure respectful representation of Anishinaabe traditions.

Outcome:

- **Elevation of community perspective** and voice in shared public spaces.
- **A more accessible** and representative public art program.
- **A more inviting and welcoming** Grand River corridor.
- **Stronger shared ownership** of public art and the placemaking process along the river corridor.
- **Deeper public appreciation** and civic pride in the Grand River corridor.



3. Develop a Long-Term Maintenance and Conservation Plan

Solution:

- **Thoroughly inventory** and conduct a maintenance and conservation survey of the existing collection of artwork to build a biannual maintenance program.
- **Establish a formalized maintenance strategy** with dedicated funding.
- **Partner with local conservators** for preservation expertise.
- **Utilize sustainable** materials suited to Michigan's environment to minimize upkeep costs.

Outcome:

- **An effective maintenance and conservation plan** where none currently exists.
- **Enhanced longevity** of public artworks and reduced long-term costs and liability.
- **A comprehensive understanding** of each artwork's condition and maintenance needs. The biannual schedule minimizes long-term damage, extends the lifespan of artworks and maintains aesthetic quality, enhancing public appreciation and engagement.



4. Implement a Sustainable Funding Strategy

Solution:

- **Develop a long-term fundraising** plan to support implementation, engaging foundations, corporations, developers and public agencies as key partners and investors.
- **Incorporate at least a 20%** maintenance allocation into all public art installation budgets to ensure long-term care and conservation.
- **Explore the feasibility of a percent-for-art program** to establish consistent public funding mechanisms.

Outcome:

- **Builds financial stability** and reliance on inconsistent or one-time funding sources.
- **Helps ensure longevity** and conservation of public artworks.



5. Foster Local Artistic Development Through Strategic Partnerships

Solution:

- **Strengthen opportunities** for local and emerging artists through apprenticeships, mentorships, and team-based commissions that foster collaboration and skill development.
- **Encourage national and established artists** to engage and build relationships with local creatives as part of their commission scope.
- Set aside a portion of project budgets to **support local artist involvement** and knowledge exchange.

Outcome:

- **Builds local artist** capacity and professional development.
- **Fosters a more universally welcoming** creative process.
- **Strengthens the local arts** ecosystem through peer learning and sustained engagement.



Strategic Vision Moving Forward

These recommendations position Grand Rapids to expand and sustain **an exceptional public art collection along the Grand River corridor**, one that's well-maintained, accessible to all and enriches civic identity and pride.



INTRODUCTION

History of Public Art on the Grand River

Definition of Public Art

Purpose of the Plan

Project Scope and Boundaries

Alignment with Broader Goals

Stakeholders and Partners

History of Public Art on the Grand River

The Grand River has long been a defining force in Grand Rapids, shaping its cultural and historical identity.

From its glacial origins, to its role as a lifeline for Indigenous communities, to becoming the first highway system for transportation, the river has been central to the region's development. Public art along the Grand River reflects this layered history, honoring the river's significance as both a natural and cultural asset by reflecting:

- **Indigenous traditions and the deep connection of the Anishinaabe people to the Grand River.**
- **Immigrant contributions, highlighting the numerous cultural communities that have shaped the City.**
- **The industrial legacy of Grand Rapids, illustrating its transformation over time.**

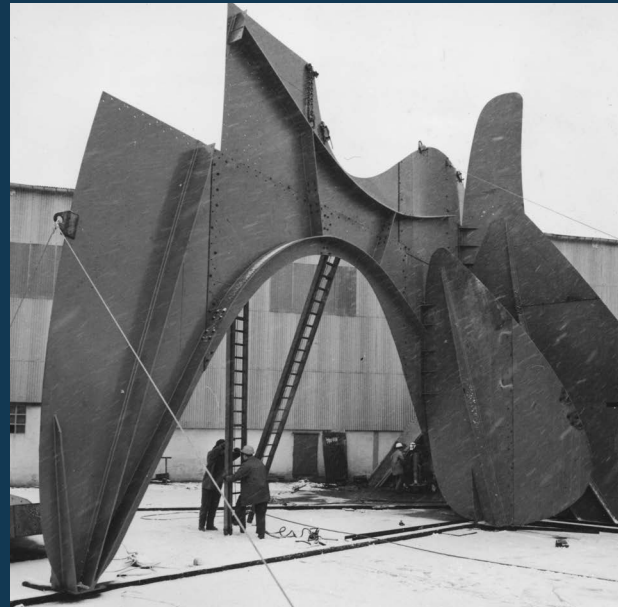
Public Art Milestones

Throughout the 20th century, key projects helped establish Grand Rapids as a leader in public art integration.



Grand Valley State University (1960)

For over 50 years, Grand Valley has integrated art into campus life, a tradition dating back to the 1960s. Today, artwork spans six GVSU campuses, becoming landmarks of the university experience.



“La Grande Vitesse” (1969)

This Alexander Calder sculpture became the first artwork funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and remains a defining symbol of the City.



“Sculpture Off the Pedestal” Exhibition (1973)

Public-private partnerships brought major works such as Robert Morris' X (the first permanent large-scale outdoor work and the first publicly funded earthwork) and Clement Meadmore's Split Ring.



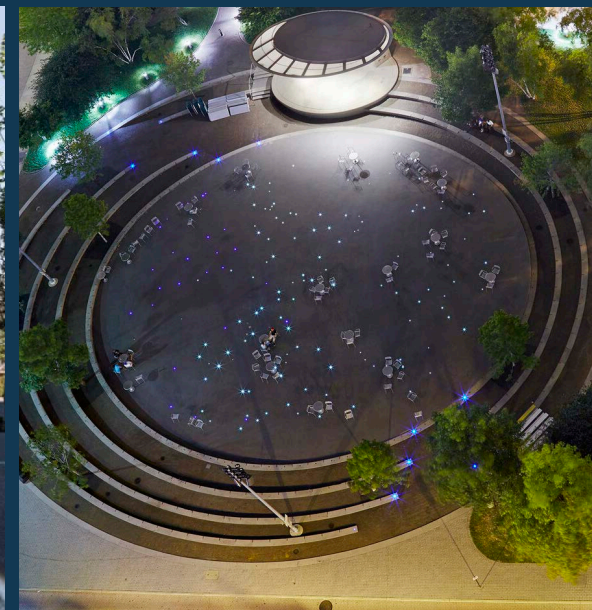
Fish Ladder Park (1974)

An innovative blend of functional infrastructure and public art, designed by Joseph Kinnebrew IV, allowing fish to bypass the Sixth Street Dam while creating an engaging public space.



Frederik Meijer Gardens Established (1995)

A world-class botanical and sculpture garden featuring works by international artists, blending nature and art to enhance cultural and educational experiences.



“Ecliptic” (2001)

A signature public artwork in Rosa Parks Circle, designed by renowned artist Maya Lin, interprets the three phases of water into an interactive urban space.



Grand Rapids Community Legends Project (2008)

An initiative funded by the Secchia Family Foundation that celebrates the rich history and contributions of individuals and groups in Grand Rapids through bronze sculptures placed throughout the City.



ArtPrize Launches (2009)

A groundbreaking, open international art competition that transformed Grand Rapids into a City-wide exhibition space, fostering public engagement and dialogue around contemporary art.



World of Winter (2018)

The World of Winter Festival began in 2018 to enliven the City during the colder months. It is now the largest winter festival in the United States, featuring numerous art installations and free, family-friendly activities including over 130+ events and installations from all over the globe during the two-month long event.



“LOVE” (2018)

The iconic pop art sculpture by Robert Indiana, gifted to Grand Rapids by the Frey Foundation, reinforces the City’s commitment to public art and cultural enrichment.



“The Four Elements” (2021)

A monumental installation by international artist Jaume Plensa features four serene human faces symbolizing earth, air, fire, and water—reinforcing the interconnectedness of nature and humanity.

Contemporary Public Art Initiatives

Today, public art remains an essential force in riverfront revitalization, with ongoing initiatives such as:

- **Return to the River Festival:** A free, all-ages August event activating the Grand River with live music, art, an artisan market, food trucks, activities, educational tours and free kayak rentals.
- **Waterfront Events and Cultural Festivals:** Community events like Global Water Fest, Ducky Dash, Friday Night Lights and water blessings celebrate the river and Grand Rapids' cultural diversity.

As Grand Rapids undertakes ecological restoration of the Grand River, public art serves as a tool for engagement, storytelling and belonging, ensuring that all communities see themselves reflected along the waterfront. The river is not just a place of history but a living canvas for the City's future.

For a more in-depth history, see Appendix [Page 105].



Definition of Public Art

Public art refers to creative works intentionally designed to be displayed in public spaces, offering aesthetic, cultural and social value. These artworks can take many forms, including sculptures, murals, installations, performances, digital media and interactive pieces. Public art is distinct in its accessibility, as it invites people to experience art in their everyday environments without the need for traditional institutional settings.

In the context of the Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan, public art serves as a bridge between the historical, cultural and natural narratives of the Grand River corridor. It encompasses both temporary and permanent works that reflect the unique identity of Grand Rapids and its communities. Key characteristics of public art in this plan include:

Integration with Place

Artworks that resonate with the physical, cultural and historical context of the Grand River corridor, enhancing the sense of place and community pride.

Welcoming Community

Works that celebrate all of Grand Rapids' residents, ensuring that public art reflects the shared heritage and aspirations of everyone.

Engagement and Education

Art that fosters community interaction, educates about environmental and cultural histories and encourages dialogue and learning.

Functionality and Sustainability

Pieces designed with eco-conscious materials and methods, blending with the natural and urban environments while maintaining long-term durability and accessibility.



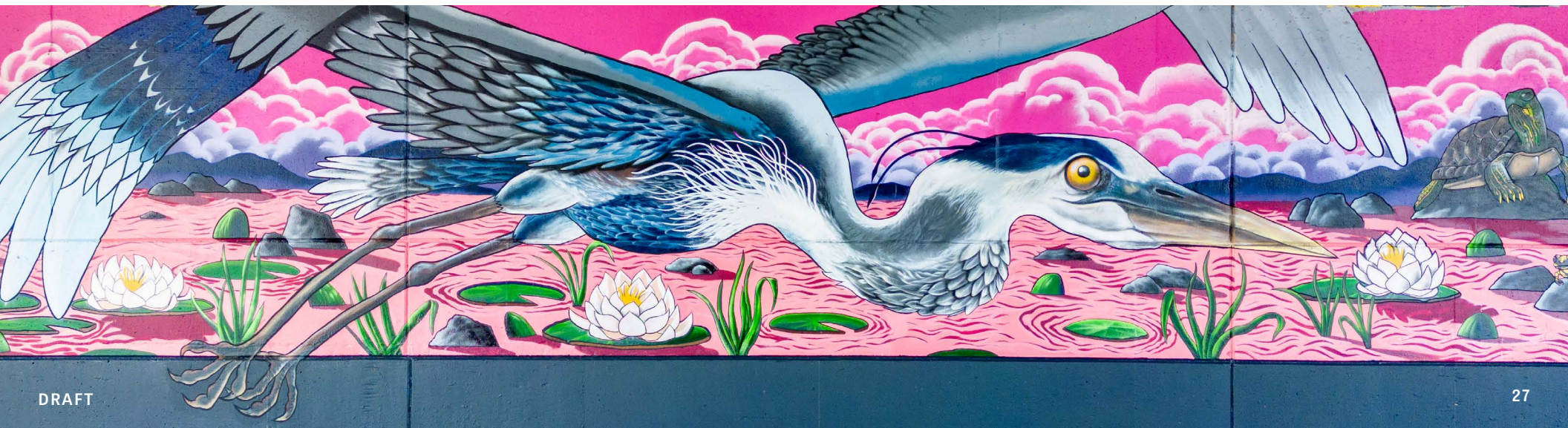
Purpose of the Plan

Commissioned by the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) and managed by Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. (DGRI) in collaboration with community stakeholders, this plan establishes a comprehensive vision for public art along the Grand River Greenway in the urban core of Grand Rapids. Developed through a collaborative process, it outlines opportunities for both permanent installations—such as gateway pieces and site-specific sculptures—and temporary works designed to activate and enrich the riverfront experience.

Plan Goals

The Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan establishes a dedicated riverfront public art program that:

- Creates a distinct and connected riverfront identity, honoring the historical and cultural landscape while fostering artistic innovation.
- Aligns with the Grand River Equity Framework, River For All, GR Forward and other civic plans to advance the community's vision for a beautiful, accessible and equitable riverfront.
- Integrates existing and new public art to create a seamless cultural experience along the Grand River corridor.
- Balances support for local artists with opportunities to engage regional, national and international talent.
- Fosters strategic partnerships among public agencies, private property owners and community organizations to support collaborative public art initiatives.
- Secures sustainable funding mechanisms for commissioning, maintaining and conserving public art.
- Expands public awareness and appreciation of riverfront public art, increasing community engagement and long-term stewardship.



Planning Objectives

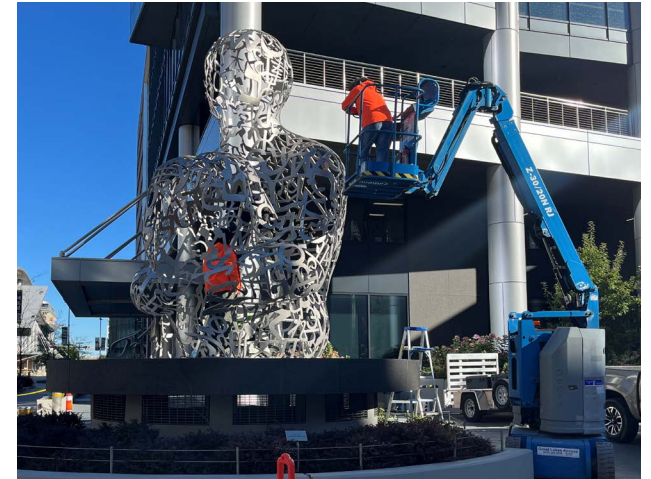
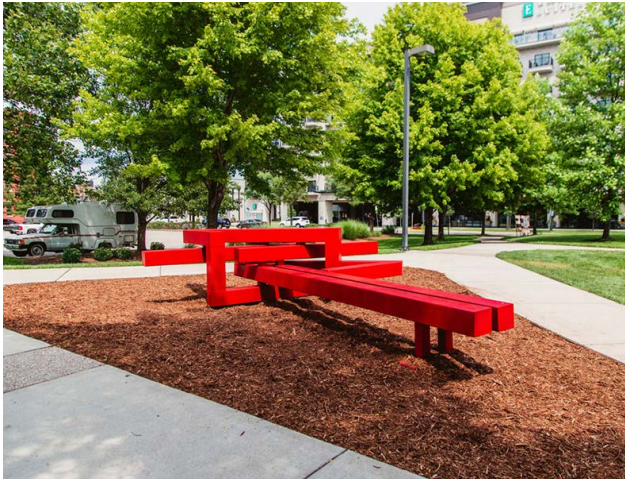
To achieve these goals, the plan outlines key planning objectives, including:

- Establishing curatorial principles that guide public art placement and integration from Riverside Park to Millennium Park.
- Defining categories of art installations and developing a consistent framework for artistic and thematic cohesion.
- Identifying and prioritizing high-impact sites for permanent and temporary art installations.
- Developing a clear artist selection process, ensuring transparency and broad participation in future public art projects.
- Expanding upon previous community engagement efforts to ensure broad and diverse participation.
- Aligning the public art plan with broader cultural initiatives and regional development strategies.
- Assessing existing policies and recommending updates to support a streamlined and effective public art program.
- Establishing sustainable funding models and partnership strategies that ensure the long-term viability of public art along the Grand River corridor.



Project Scope and Boundaries

The Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan applies to all public art projects along the Grand River Greenway in Grand Rapids, including new and existing works, capital improvement projects and cultural programs. The plan provides guidance for:



1. Integration of Public Art

- New permanent and temporary public art projects, including gateway pieces and site-specific installations.
- Public art components in major infrastructure projects (both public and private) along the river corridor.
- Public art initiatives as part of large-scale events, festivals or cultural programs.

2. Capital and Infrastructure Projects

- Capital improvement projects on land owned, managed or influenced by public partners (e.g., the City of Grand Rapids, Kent County).
- Enhancements to parks, riverfront pedestrian zones, bridges, pathways and riverwalks integrating public art.
- Public, quasi-public and private riverfront properties collaborating with the public art program to enhance connectivity.

3. Maintenance and Policy Development

- Preserving and restoring existing public art to ensure its longevity.
- Developing or updating policies and plans that guide the placement, funding and upkeep of public art within the Grand River Greenway.
- Allocating maintenance budgets for new artworks to support long-term care, preservation and sustainability.



4. Cultural and Creative Placemaking Activities

In addition to permanent installations, the plan supports public art programs and creative placemaking efforts that enrich cultural life along the Grand River corridor, including:

- Rotating exhibits and temporary installations.
- Lighting projects enhancing shared public spaces.
- Interactive installations engaging the community.

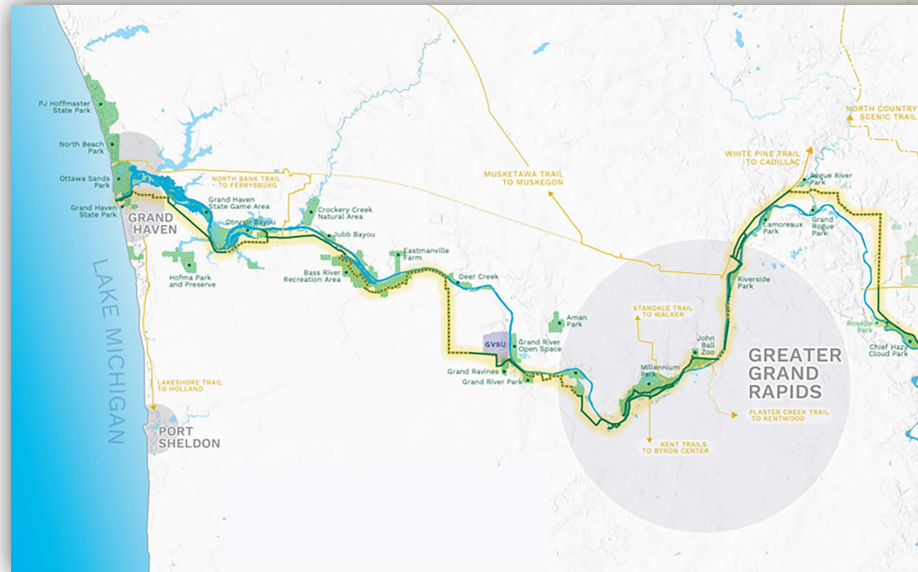
5. Stakeholders and Partners

This plan serves as a resource for a wide range of stakeholders, including:

- DGRI staff and contractors overseeing public art projects.
- City and County officials and staff involved in decision-making.
- Property developers, business owners and private landowners partnering on public art initiatives.
- Artists, art collectives and consultants engaged in public art programming.
- Community stakeholders, including residents and local organizations.
- Government agencies, philanthropic organizations and funding bodies supporting public art.

6. Geographic Scope

The Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan covers the riverfront corridor from **Riverside Park to Millennium Park**, encompassing key public spaces, parks, trails and infrastructure within Grand Rapids' urban core.



-  **GRAND RIVER GREENWAY TRAIL**
PROPOSED / PLANNED SEGMENTS
-  **EXISTING REGIONAL TRAILS**
PROPOSED / PLANNED SEGMENTS
-  **PARKS & OPEN SPACES**
-  **CITIES**
-  **COUNTY BOUNDARIES**
-  **RIVERS & LAKES**
-  **DOWNTOWN DESTINATIONS**



Alignment with Broader Goals

The Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan builds upon and reinforces prior planning efforts that have shaped the **Grand River Greenway** in Grand Rapids, ensuring that public art is an integral component of the region's long-term vision. It aligns with existing plans and initiatives across five key areas:



1. Cultural Enrichment

- Expands Grand Rapids' creative identity by commissioning diverse, high-quality artworks that celebrate the City's history, cultures and values.
- Strengthens the work of the Arts and Culture Collective of Grand Rapids (ACCGR) by integrating public art into the City's broader cultural strategy.
- Positions the Grand River as a dynamic hub for cultural expression through collaborations with local, regional and international artists.

2. Community Engagement

- Embeds Anishinaabek and Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians perspectives, ensuring Indigenous histories and traditions are authentically represented in the public art landscape.
- Aligns with the Grand River Equity Framework and Grand Rapids Strategic Plan by encouraging broad community engagement and integrating meaningful cultural stories.

3. Environmental and Fiscal Sustainability

- Advances Green Grand Rapids objectives by integrating public art with ecological restoration efforts, green infrastructure and sustainability practices.
- Ensures public art investments align with ongoing conservation initiatives to protect the river corridor for future generations.



4. Economic Development

- Supports the GR Forward Master Plan and the City of Grand Rapids Strategic Plan by leveraging public art to drive tourism, stimulate economic activity and strengthen local business engagement.
- Reinforces Grand Rapids' reputation as a vibrant arts and cultural destination through strategic investments in creative placemaking.



5. Urban Design and Connectivity

- Aligns with River For All and the Grand River Greenway Plan to enhance riverfront public spaces, improve accessibility and integrate art into urban development.
- Creates an interconnected network of art-infused trails, bridges and recreational spaces, fostering exploration and community interaction.

Through strategic alignment with community plans and priorities the Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan can serve as a catalyst for cultural, social and environmental transformation and reinforce Grand Rapids as a leader in creative placemaking and community-centered urban design.

A full list of relevant plans and their pertinence to public art can be found in the Appendix (page 105).

CURATORIAL FRAMEWORK

Guiding Core Principles

Defining Public Art Types

Balancing Temporary vs. Permanent Installations

Balancing Local and National/International Artists

Grand River Public Art Curatorial Vision

A curatorial vision serves as the guiding framework for a public art program, ensuring cohesion, artistic integrity and meaningful community engagement. It establishes a clear narrative that connects individual artworks to the broader cultural and environmental context, creating a unified experience that enhances public spaces.

This public art program envisions art as a catalyst for civic dialogue and cultural expression along the Grand River corridor. Aligned with past community plans, it aims to create an inviting and accessible riverfront while pushing the boundaries of contemporary public art. The program aims to integrate art into daily life along the river through a carefully curated blend of permanent and temporary installations, community partnership projects and participatory works. This approach seeks to cultivate a stronger sense of place and foster deeper community connections.

Guiding Principles

Access and Representation

- Ensure accurate Indigenous and community storytelling is embedded in artwork placement and themes.
- Create opportunities for all artists by engaging a range of perspectives and lived experiences.
- Develop multilingual interpretive materials and programming.
- Consider physical accessibility in artwork placement and design.

Artistic Excellence and Innovation

- Commission works from established, emerging and experimental artists.
- Embrace diverse artistic mediums, including traditional sculpture, digital art, sound installations and ephemeral works.
- Encourage experimental approaches that challenge conventional public art.
- Maintain high standards of artistic quality and conceptual rigor.

Civic Engagement

- Stimulate meaningful dialogue about the cultural history and future of Grand Rapids.
- Encourage community participation in the artistic process.
- Support works that reflect local histories, cultures and aspirations.
- Develop programming that fosters public interaction and discourse.

Context and Sustainability

- Create a continuous, interconnected public art trail along the Grand River Greenway.
- Strategically place artworks to enhance cultural and visual connectivity.
- Commission iconic pieces at key riverfront locations to strengthen identity and placemaking.
- Promote environmental sustainability through materials and design.
- Balance permanent and temporary installations to reflect evolving community needs.
- Integrate public art with urban planning and infrastructure initiatives.

Defining Public Art Types

The Grand River Public Art Program embraces a multi-dimensional approach, integrating both physical and experiential art forms to enhance public engagement.

1. Permanent Art Installations

These anchor pieces establish a lasting cultural identity and reinforce the historical and artistic significance of the river corridor.

Sculptures and Site-Specific Installations

Monumental sculptures serving as landmark artworks that create bold, site-responsive focal points along the river.

Functional Art

Benches, lighting and integrated design elements that enhance public spaces.

Gateway Art

Large-scale works at key entry points along the river.



2. Temporary and Rotational Exhibits

Dynamic, short-term installations that encourage engagement, experimentation and evolving narratives.

Interactive and Ephemeral Art

A form of art that actively engages the viewer, encouraging participation and transforming the experience from passive observation to active involvement.

Projection and Light-Based Works

An enhanced riverfront experience during nighttime activations.

Festival and Event-Based Art

Rotating installations aligned with specific events such as ArtPrize, World of Winter and Return to the River and others.



Blending Temporary vs. Permanent Installations

The Grand River Public Art Program recognizes the importance of balancing temporary and permanent installations to foster a dynamic cultural landscape.

Temporary Installations

Temporary works typically range from one month to five years and are valuable for:

Flexibility and Relevance – Responding to timely social, environmental or cultural issues.

Community Engagement – Encouraging interaction through participatory experiences.

Artistic Experimentation – Allowing artists to explore new concepts without long-term constraints.

Rotational Programming – Keeping the riverfront fresh and engaging for repeat visitors.

Permanent Installations

Long-term artworks typically range from 30 to 50 years and anchor public identity and create legacy pieces for the Grand River corridor:

Cultural Anchors – Establishing symbols of community identity and pride.

Historical Narratives – Commemorating the region's history, values and aspirations.

Infrastructure Integration – Enhancing public spaces through functional and artistic elements.

Long-Term Impact – Ensuring enduring value and appreciation across generations.



Curatorial Strategies for Balance

To maintain a thoughtful balance between temporary and permanent installations, the program will:

Assess Site Suitability – Evaluate locations based on visibility, accessibility and environmental impact.

Engage Community Input – Solicit feedback to ensure artworks reflect local values and priorities.

Establish Rotational Programs – Partner with ArtPrize, World of Winter and others to maintain ongoing cultural experiences.

Foster Artist Collaborations – Engage a mix of local and international artists.

Incorporate Sustainability – Use eco-friendly materials and, when possible, align with environmental goals.

Expand Programming – Integrate performance-based art alongside visual installations for a multidisciplinary experience.

Balancing Local and National/International Artists

The Grand River Public Art Program embraces the value of both local and national/international artists to create a vibrant, welcoming and high-quality public art experience. A balanced approach ensures that the program nurtures, honors and uplifts the unique artistic voices of Grand Rapids while also engaging broader artistic influences that push creative boundaries, foster cross-cultural dialogue and elevate the City's presence in the global arts community.

The Importance of Local Artists

Supporting local artists is vital for fostering community pride and talent development in public art. By prioritizing local artists, the program:

Amplifies Local Narratives – Ensures that the artwork reflects the history, culture and lived experiences of Grand Rapids residents.

Strengthens the Local Creative Economy – Provides opportunities for Grand Rapids-based artists to showcase their work and sustain their careers.

Encourages Community Participation – Engages local artists in participatory and community-driven projects that foster civic pride and involvement.

Supports Emerging Talent – Provides mentorship and professional opportunities for early-career artists to grow their experience and portfolio.

Exchanges Resources – Facilitates dialogue and exchange between local and national/ international artists, opening up opportunities for local artists to refine their medium and grow their work.



The Value of National and International Artists

Bringing in national and international artists introduces fresh perspectives, innovation and world-class artistic excellence to Grand Rapids. Their involvement:

Elevates the City's Cultural Profile – Positions Grand Rapids as a global arts destination, attracting visitors and reinforcing its reputation as a leader in public art.

Introduces New Artistic Techniques and Media – Encourages experimentation with new forms, materials and interdisciplinary approaches.

Fosters Cultural Exchange and Learning – Provides opportunities for local artists and the community to engage with a variety of artistic traditions and global creative influences.

Enhances Landmark Commissions – Ensures that high-visibility, large-scale projects meet the highest artistic standards and contribute to the City's long-term cultural legacy.



Curatorial Strategies for Balance

To achieve an effective balance between local and national/international artists, the program will:

Prioritize Local Artists for Community-Based Projects – Ensure that neighborhood-focused and participatory works reflect the voices of Grand Rapids residents.

Commission National/International Artists – Commission both acclaimed local and international artists for landmark projects; reserve large-scale, high-profile installations for creators with demonstrated expertise.

Facilitate Artist Collaborations – Encourage partnerships between local and national/international artists to create dynamic, cross-cultural works.

Establish Residency and Exchange Programs – Develop opportunities for visiting artists to engage with the community and for Grand Rapids artists to gain exposure in national and international venues.

Engage Local Artists in Supporting Roles – Involve local fabricators, apprentices and creative professionals in major projects to build capacity and support professional development.

By showcasing both local and global talent, the Grand River Public Art Program will foster a vibrant, welcoming and world-class cultural scene that connects with the community while establishing Grand Rapids as a leader in public art and creative placemaking.



PUBLIC ART PLACEMENT PLAN

Public Art Placement Overview

Types of Artworks and Goals

Material, Medium and Implementation Considerations

Priority Areas for Installation

Public Art Proposed Placement Plan

Public Art Placement Overview

The Grand River Public Art Placement Plan provides a comprehensive strategy for integrating public art along the Grand River Greenway, ensuring it becomes a cornerstone of the corridor's cultural, ecological and community identity. This chapter outlines the vision, criteria and recommended locations for public art, as well as considerations for mediums, timelines and budgets.

Through thoughtful placement and curation, this plan seeks to transform the riverfront into a dynamic and welcoming cultural destination, reinforcing Grand Rapids as a national leader in creative placemaking.

Types of Artwork and Goals

The Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan applies to all public art projects along the Grand River Greenway in Grand Rapids, including new and existing works, capital improvement projects and cultural programs. The plan provides guidance for:



Monumental Sculpture

Monumental sculptures serving as landmark artworks, creating bold, site-responsive focal points along the river.



Play-Friendly and Interactive Artworks

Engaging sculptures designed for interaction, inviting visitors to explore, climb or play with the artwork while enhancing the riverfront experience.



Murals

Large-scale artworks painted or applied directly to walls or surfaces in public spaces, often reflecting local culture, history or social themes.



New Media Artworks

Contemporary art utilizing digital technology, projections, augmented reality (AR) or soundscapes to create dynamic and immersive experiences.



Gateway Works

Sculptures or installations positioned at key entrances to signify transitions into distinct spaces such as parks, neighborhoods or City districts.



Light-Based Works

Illuminated installations, including projections or integrated lighting on bridges and structures that enhance visibility, ambiance and interaction along the river.

Material, Medium and Budget Ranges

Durability

- Use weather-resistant materials such as stainless steel, bronze, Cor-Ten steel, treated wood and outdoor-grade paints.
- Ensure materials can withstand seasonal changes including freezing temperatures, flooding, high winds and UV exposure.

Material Palette

- Cor-Ten Steel: Durable, low-maintenance and weather-resistant, reflecting the area's industrial history while developing a natural patina over time.
- Sustainable Materials: Locally-sourced stone, eco-friendly composites and renewable wood treatments.
- Vibrant Accents: Colorful elements incorporated into sculptures and murals to enhance visual engagement.
- Interactive and Kinetic Features: Elements that encourage public interaction, such as motion-activated lighting, rotating components or tactile surfaces.



Sustainability

- Prioritize recycled, reclaimed or eco-friendly materials to align with the Greenway's environmental goals.
- Source materials locally where possible to reduce environmental impact and support regional economies.

Budget Ranges

These budget estimates serve as general guidelines, with actual costs varying based on materials, fabrication, scale and installation complexity:

- Small-Scale Artworks: \$10,000–\$50,000 (e.g., murals, functional art or small sculptures).
- Medium-Scale Artworks: \$50,000–\$400,000 (e.g., interactive installations or larger standalone sculptures).
- Large-Scale Artworks: \$400,000+ (e.g., landmark sculptures, amphitheaters or integrated multi-element projects).

Additional Considerations

- Community Engagement: Collaborate with local residents, artists and cultural organizations to ensure artworks reflect the community's identity and values.
- Lighting and Safety: Integrate eco-friendly lighting to enhance nighttime visibility, public safety and artwork aesthetics.
- Climate-Responsive Design: Encourage works that adapt to seasonal conditions, such as winter-friendly displays, cooling elements for summer or interactive features that change with environmental conditions.
- Maintenance and Conservation Planning: Establish preventative maintenance schedules and long-term conservation strategies to ensure the longevity and visual integrity of the artworks.



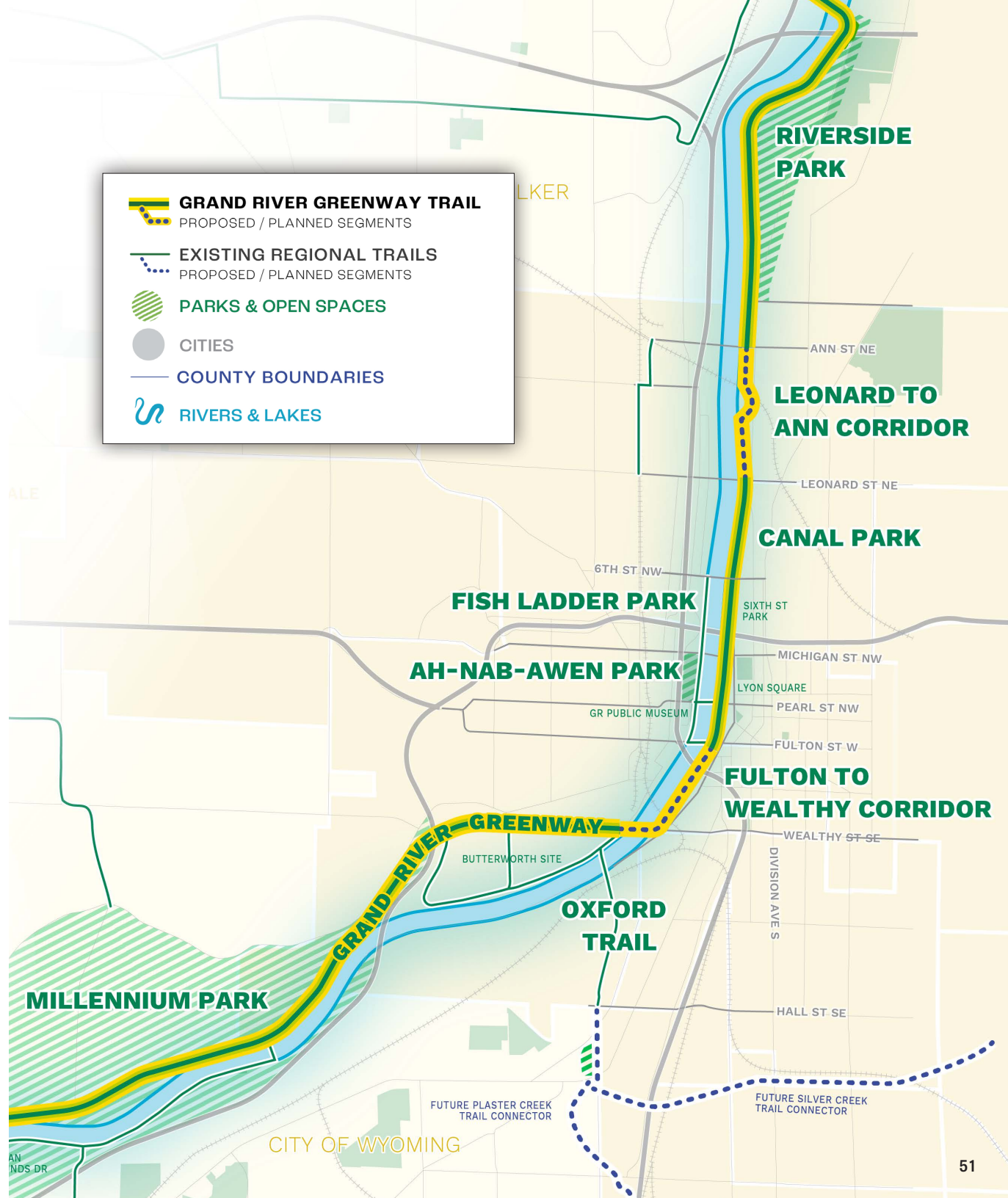
Priority Areas for Installation

Based on community feedback and strategic analysis, the following areas have been identified as priority zones for public art installations, encompassing new permanent and temporary projects. These locations include gateway landmarks, site-specific installations and integrated opportunities.

Some sites are prioritized due to their prominence and significance within the Greenway system, such as Riverside Park, Millennium Park and Ah-Nab-Awen Park, serving as key cultural and ecological anchors.

Others are identified as priority locations due to upcoming capital improvements and public site opportunities, including new trail segments from Fulton to Wealthy and Leonard to Ann.

While this section highlights key priority locations, additional public and private sites not explicitly listed also present opportunities to utilize and implement this plan, ensuring a flexible and adaptable framework for integrating public art throughout the Grand River corridor.



Public Art Proposed Placement Plan

This section provides detailed insights into each priority site, including unique curatorial goals, organized sequentially **from north to south along the corridor.**

Riverside Park

This popular park along the Grand River has long been a gathering place for the community for both large events and daily use. Recent renovations, including an accessible kayak launch and a new picnic pavilion, aim to enhance its recreational offerings while preserving its historic role as a riverfront destination. These areas align with the overarching vision of transforming the Greenway into an immersive cultural experience.

Key Features

Recreation Spaces: Soccer and baseball fields, playgrounds and trails

Gathering and Event Spaces: Bandshell shelter, picnic shelters and open event lawns

Water Access: Boat launches, accessible kayak launch and shoreline fishing

Natural Areas: Lagoon, wooded areas and native plantings



Location:

2001 Monroe Ave NE,
Grand Rapids, MI 49505

Ownership:

City of Grand Rapids

Riverside Park

Proposed Placement of Future Art



1

Gateway Entry Points (Sculpture): Marking the entrance to the revitalized district, these sculptural installations serve as both artistic landmarks and functional elements.



3

Interactive Sculpture: Harmonizing sight, sound and touch for an immersive experience.



2

Monumental Sculpture: Along the trail, majestic Cor-ten steel sculptures rise, embodying monumental elegance as organic forms merge with industrial textures.



4

Thematic Murals: Adorn restroom buildings and pavilions with murals depicting local wildlife and historical scenes to educate and beautify.



New River Edge Trail: Leonard St to Ann St

This scenic stretch along the river is steeped in history, once serving as a key industrial area with warehouses and mills. The upcoming trail project will transform into a lively space connecting residential neighborhoods with Downtown and the natural beauty of the Grand River. The New River Edge Trail will connect Leonard St to Ann St along the east bank of the Grand River, closing a critical gap in the regional nonmotorized trail system and enhancing access between Downtown Grand Rapids, Riverside Park and the White Pine Trail State Park.

Key Features and Future Improvements

Multi-Use Trail and Connectivity: 12-foot-wide trail, ADA-accessible routes, safe at-grade crossings and integration with future underpasses at street and railroad bridges.

Public Spaces and River Access: River-oriented plaza and future river access point(s).

Environmental Considerations: Elevated trail through the site above the 100-year flood level, lower boardwalks to protect sensitive habitats and improved connections between Monroe Avenue, the river and play areas.



Location:

1529 Monroe Ave NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49505

Ownership:

City of Grand Rapids

New River Edge Trail: Leonard St to Ann St

Proposed Placement of Future Art



1 Gateway Entry Points (Sculpture): Define the entrance to the revitalized district, these sculptural installations serve as both artistic landmarks and functional elements.



4 Central Plaza Sculpture: Develop public art installations that complement spaces designed for eating and drinking, encouraging community bonding and social interactions along the riverfront. These installations can include seating elements, shade structures or visual art that invites visitors to relax and connect in a shared space (Second Phase).



2 Bridge Underpass (Digital): Introduce a subtle, integrated light installation adhered to the bridge underpass to serve as a distinctive visual feature and a practical enhancement for pedestrian safety. Designed to illuminate the pathway softly, this lighting would enhance visibility in low-light conditions while creating a dynamic, artistic experience.



5 Water Tank Mural: Utilize the water tank as a prominent canvas for a painted or tile mural that celebrates the heritage of Grand Rapids. This mural could depict City history scenes, honor Indigenous roots or showcase community resilience and pride symbols. The mural would beautify the area and serve as a landmark that inspires community spirit. (Second Phase)



3 Entry Point Lawn Sculpture: Install a climbable, interactive sculpture on the terraced lawn landing. This piece should be vibrant and colorful, inviting visitors of all ages to explore and engage with the art physically.



Canal Park

A picturesque park along the Grand River with historic ties to the area’s early water transport and milling industries, Canal Park has been transformed through a major renovation that preserves its heritage, enhances river access, supports ecological health and introduces new recreational and cultural opportunities, creating a vibrant, accessible community space.

Key Features and Future Improvements

Play and Recreation: Universally accessible “River Story” play space with play towers, bridges, stone steppers, sculptures and interpretive paving narrating the Owashtanong & Gitchi-zibi river story.

Community and Event Spaces: Multi-purpose plaza with a rentable enclosed pavilion for events and gatherings.

River Access and Scenic Enhancements: River overlooks, seating terraces and an accessible kayak launch to expand water recreation opportunities.

Environmental and Cultural Connections: Improved ecological health, enhanced accessibility and features celebrating the Grand River’s cultural heritage.



Location:

941 Monroe Ave NW,
Grand Rapids, 49503

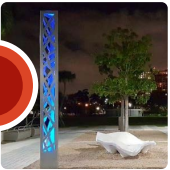
Ownership:

City of Grand Rapids

Canal Park

Proposed Placement of Future Art

1



Gateway Entry Points (Sculpture): Marking the entrance to the revitalized district, these sculptural installations serve as both artistic landmarks and functional elements.

2



Relocated Sculpture: *Manidoo Bawating* is a permanent 11-foot steel sculpture honoring the important symbols and unique traditions of the Native American community that thrived along the Grand River and throughout the Great Lakes region.

3



Life Sculpture: This sculpture embodies life, incorporating elements inspired by river creatures and plant life that thrive along the Grand River. It celebrates the sacredness of life and the river's nurturing role.

4



Water Sculpture: A sculpture symbolizing the quiet, life-giving force of water, reflecting the riverfront's role as a source of sustenance, connection and renewal for the surrounding community.



Fish Ladder Park

Located along the Grand River in the heart of Downtown, this unique park is home to a sculptural fish ladder designed by Joseph Kinnebrew IV. The artwork reflects the area's commitment to environmental sustainability and innovative public art. Fish Ladder Park is both an iconic community gathering place and an ecological landmark. Following the removal of the Fourth Street Dam, the fish ladder structure will be modified to continue supporting fish passage, while the surrounding park evolves into a hub for whitewater competition spectators, boaters, and fishing enthusiasts.

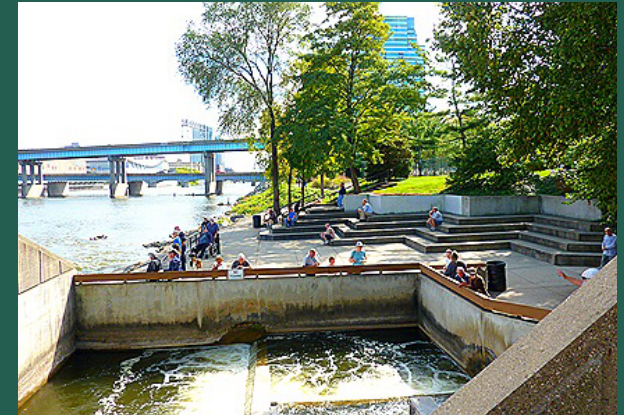
Key Features and Future Improvements

Fish Ladder Restoration: Designed by artist Joseph Kinnebrew IV, the historic Fish Ladder is a significant public artwork and functional passageway for migrating fish, which will be restored and enhanced as part of the park's improvements.

Public Spaces and Gathering Areas: Flexible plaza and sloped event lawn for community gatherings, shaded picnic groves and an overlook deck with river views.

River Access and Connectivity: Accessible pathways, angling and wading access steps, a high-water trail and an emergency boat ramp.

Visitor Amenities: Changing rooms, restrooms, a fish cleaning station and enhanced pedestrian connections linking Scribner Ave to Fish Ladder Park.



Location:

624 Front Ave NW
Grand Rapids, MI, 49504

Ownership:

City of Grand Rapids

Fish Ladder

Proposed Placement of Future Art



1

Gateway Entry Points (Sculpture): Marking the entrance to the revitalized district, these sculptural installations serve as both artistic landmarks and functional elements.



3

Interpretive Sculptures: A series of small-scale sculptures showcasing fish, birds and local wildlife found along the Grand River. Each piece incorporates educational elements that highlight the species' role in the river ecosystem, inviting visitors to explore the interconnectedness of nature and the importance of conservation.



2

Pathway Sculptures: A series of small sculptures or mosaics depicting fish, plants and insects will line the walkway leading to the fish ladder. These installations will be accompanied by educational plaques, turning the path into an interactive learning journey.



Ah-Nab-Awen Park

Ah-Nab-Awen Park is a 6.5-acre urban park along the Grand River in Downtown Grand Rapids, deeply rooted in Indigenous history. Once home to an Ottawa (Odawa) village, its name—meaning “Resting Place”—reflects its cultural significance. Known for its public art, interpretive markers and landmarks like the Lorrie’s Button sculpture, the park serves as a key venue for festivals and community gatherings. A planned renovation will preserve its heritage while modernizing amenities to improve accessibility and community engagement.

Key Features and Future Improvements

Cultural and Historical Preservation: Restoration and enhancement of the symbolic Indian Mounds in collaboration with the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians and the Downtown Development Authority to honor the site’s Indigenous heritage.

Upgraded Visitor Amenities: New modern restrooms, ADA-accessible walkways, upgraded concrete pathways along the river edge and refined landscaping, including the removal of overgrown and invasive vegetation and the addition of retaining walls, to enhance aesthetics and functionality.

Future Enhancements: Expansion of accessible pathways and development of flexible, community-oriented spaces in the “lower bowl” area between Bridge Street and the Gillett Bridge, supporting cultural programming and public events.



Location:

220 Front Ave NW,
Grand Rapids, MI, 49504

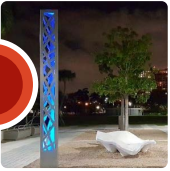
Ownership:

City of Grand Rapids

Ah-Nab-Awen Park

Proposed Placement of Future Art

1



Gateway Entry Points (Sculpture): Marking the entrance to the revitalized district, these sculptural installations serve as both artistic landmarks and functional elements.

3



Three Fires Sculpture: Visible from across the Grand River, the *Three Fires* sculpture symbolizes the unity of the Anishinaabe people—the Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi Nations. Its internal lighting system illuminates the night, representing resilience, connection - and the enduring presence of Indigenous cultures in the region.

2



Concrete Pavers: Etched with narratives, symbols, and artwork, these pavers share the park's significance to the Anishinaabe people and the broader history of Grand Rapids. Guiding visitors along the pathways, they seamlessly blend storytelling with the landscape, honoring the spirit of the Grand River.



Fulton St to Wealthy St Corridor

The Fulton to Wealthy Corridor is a key segment of the Grand River redevelopment effort in Downtown Grand Rapids, transforming former surface parking and public works areas into a dynamic riverfront destination. As part of the broader Grand River Greenway initiative, the project will enhance public access, recreation and cultural engagement through new green spaces, trails and public art. Planned improvements include a 4.5-acre greenspace, a ½-mile nonmotorized riverfront trail and expanded seating areas with scenic river views, alongside connections to the Acrisure Amphitheater and future mixed-use developments.

Key Features and Recent Improvements

Public Spaces and Community Access: 4.5-acre greenspace, expanded seating areas and designated spaces for public art installations.

Trails and Connectivity: ½-mile nonmotorized riverfront trail system, linking to new river access points and mixed-use development.

Cultural and Recreational Enhancements: The new Acrisure Amphitheater for large-scale performances and a pocket park for leisure and community gatherings.

Environmental and Accessibility Upgrades: Urban tree canopy enhancements with native plantings for biodiversity and stormwater management and ADA-compliant accessibility improvements.



Location:

Fulton St. to Wealthy St.
along the Grand River

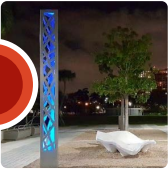
Ownership:

City of Grand Rapids; Grand Rapids-Kent
County Convention Arena Authority; future
private development


Fulton St to Wealthy St Corridor

Proposed Placement of Future Art


1 **Gateway Entry Points (Sculpture):** Marking the entrance to the revitalized district, these sculptural installations serve as both artistic landmarks and functional elements.




4 **Sculptural Pavilion:** A tranquil community space by day and lively gathering spot at night. The park offers lush greenery, shaded paths and intimate seating. A central pavilion hosts performances, events and gatherings, while a monumental sculpture serves as a visual focal point.




2 **North Hillside Sculpture:** A dynamic and interactive sculptural installation designed to activate the hillside. This piece could incorporate climbable elements, kinetic movement or optical illusions to create an engaging experience that changes depending on the viewer's perspective.



5 **Amphitheater Parking Garage:** There are mural opportunities on the amphitheater parking garage facing river and/or Market.



3 **Sculpture:** There are two opportunities for sculptural works—one at the entrance of Market Avenue and another along the riverfront. Together, these installations can serve as welcoming gateways and visual anchors, marking key transitions into the riverfront experience. Their bold, site-responsive designs can reflect the surrounding urban context while offering moments of pause, gathering, and orientation.




Oxford Trail

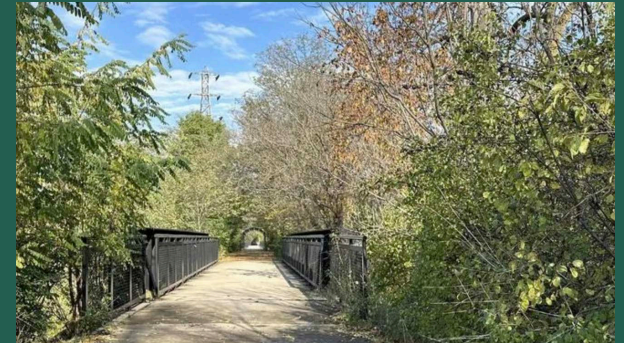
Oxford Trail provides a vital connection between the southside neighborhoods of Black Hills and Roosevelt Park to Downtown Grand Rapids and the regional Grand River Greenway network. Shaped by extensive community engagement, will introduce over 1.5 miles of enhanced trails and amenities designed for all ages and abilities. The improvements prioritize universal accessibility, new green spaces for resting and gathering and public art that reflects the cultural heritage of the surrounding neighborhoods.

Key Features and Recent Improvements

Recreation and Gathering Spaces: New linear park with a playground, picnic areas and a small performance amphitheater.

Trails and Connectivity: New neighborhood access points and a trail extension south to Hall Street.

Cultural and Community Enhancements: Public artworks celebrating the diverse cultures of the surrounding neighborhoods.



Location:

751 Oxford St. SW
Grand Rapids, MI, 49503

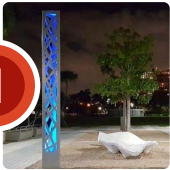
Ownership:

City of Grand Rapids

Oxford Trail

Proposed Placement of Future Art

1



Gateway Entry Points (Sculpture): Marking the entrance to the revitalized district, these sculptural installations serve as both artistic landmarks and functional elements.

2



Oxford Trail Mural (Market Ave Bridge): A community landmark that reflects local identity and fosters pride.

3



Sculpture: A landmark installation of illuminated, flowing forms that symbolize community connection and transformation. Designed to stand out both day and night, its dynamic presence fosters a sense of movement and unity within the urban landscape.

4

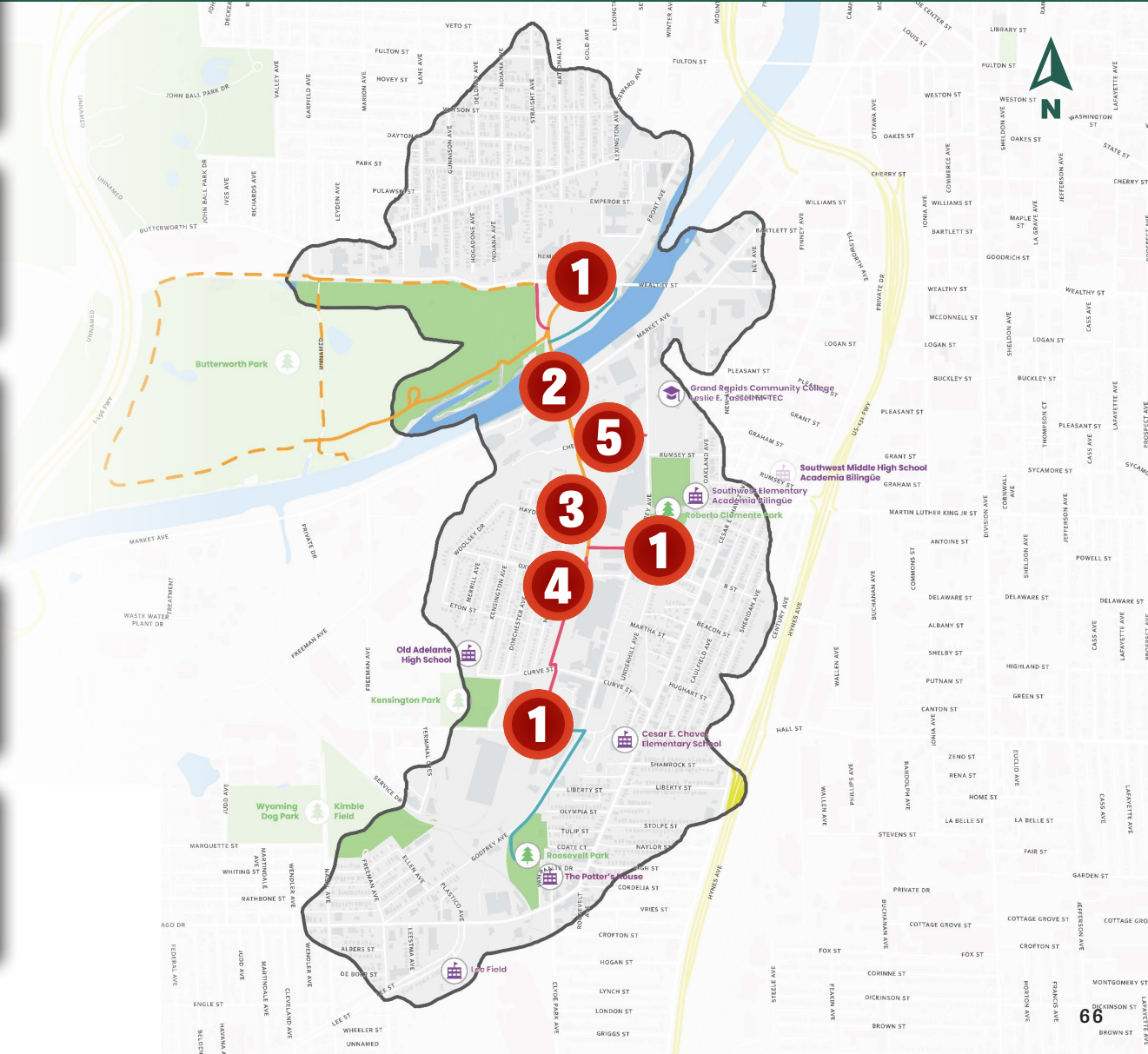


Cultural Connection Mural (Oxford St Underpass): A vibrant mural weaving together cultures, storytelling and shared histories to celebrate unity and diversity in the community.

5



Mural (Chestnut St Bridge): A vibrant artwork honoring cultural identity, resilience and connection between people and place.



Millennium Park

Millennium Park is one of the largest urban parks in the United States, spanning 1,400 acres along six miles of Grand River frontage. Developed on reclaimed industrial land, the park serves as a regional destination for outdoor recreation, nature appreciation and ecological stewardship. It features 18 miles of trails, a beach, splash pad, playgrounds, boat rentals and fishing areas. Recent and planned improvements focus on enhancing accessibility and connectivity, integrating Millennium Park into the Grand River Greenway and expanding the Grand River Edges Trail to link Downtown Grand Rapids to the park.

Key Features and Recent Improvements

Recreation and Water Access: Six-acre beach and splash pad, boat rental facilities and fishing piers.

Trails and Connectivity: Nearly 18 miles of trails linking to the 15-mile Kent Trails system, with planned extensions to the Grand River Greenway.

Infrastructure and Accessibility: Heated restrooms for year-round use, improved structural facilities and expanded nonmotorized trail connections.



Location:

1415 Maynard Ave SW
Walker, MI 49534

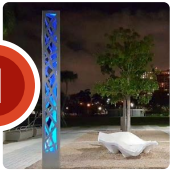
Ownership:

Kent County Parks Department

Millennium Park

Proposed Placement of Future Art

1



Gateway Entry Points (Sculpture): Marking the entrance to the revitalized district, these sculptural installations serve as both artistic landmarks and functional elements.

2



Monumental Sculpture: Large Cor-ten steel sculpture composed of cellular forms inspired by nature.

3



Interactive Sculpture: Enchant play areas with climbable, larger-than-life sculptures featuring fantastical creatures and vibrant colors, sparking imagination and playful discovery.



Other Opportunities

Beyond planned park and trail improvements, additional opportunities exist to enhance the Grand River corridor through innovative public art and creative placemaking projects. These initiatives aim to activate key sites along the riverfront, offering immersive, interactive and visually compelling experiences for residents and visitors.

Institutional and private sites: The curatorial framework should be considered for all riverfront sites with public access to support a cohesive experience.

Projection Mapping at Lyon Square: A planned digital art installation using light and projections to transform the urban landscape, creating dynamic, ever-changing visuals.

Art in the River: Opportunities for floating or submerged artworks that interact with the river's natural movement, reinforcing the connection between art, water and the environment.

Bridge Activation: Enhancements to iconic structure through temporary or permanent art installations, including lighting, banners and sculptural elements.

Floodwall Murals and Mosaics: Large-scale public art projects along floodwalls, integrating murals or mosaics that celebrate local culture, history and environmental themes.

These projects will further establish the Grand River corridor as a vibrant cultural destination, blending art, nature and community engagement.



Aspirational Art Works

While the Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan is rooted in community, place-based storytelling and local artist development, it also envisions a future where landmark artworks elevate the City's national profile. Aspirational Artworks are ambitious, iconic pieces that have the potential to serve as cultural anchors—works that not only win awards but also create economic draw, attract cultural tourism and define the identity of the corridor at a regional or national level.

These works are typically created by renowned artists or collaborative teams known for pushing boundaries in scale, form or social impact. When strategically placed, they can transform underutilized areas into destinations, catalyze investment and spark civic pride. Importantly, they complement rather than compete with grassroots art efforts, helping to knit together the local and global through creativity.

By setting aside space and vision for aspirational works, the plan ensures that Grand Rapids remains competitive and culturally vibrant, inviting bold ideas, artistic excellence and public dialogue into the heart of the riverfront experience.





MANAGEMENT AND FUNDING



Overview

Analysis of Current Context, Gaps and Opportunities for Collaboration

Oversight and Community Voice

Management

Funding

Staffing

Suggestions for City and County Government

Roles and Responsibilities

Overview

The Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan is an ambitious expression of the community's vision of a River For All. It calls for a transformative approach to public art on the riverfront and the development of new systems to sustain an expanding collection. Through strategic partnerships, structured funding and coordinated governance, the Greenway can fully realize its potential as a vibrant, welcoming and sustainable cultural corridor.

The vision will require a strong community voice, sustained investment and a steady focus on realizing the goals of this plan. This section lays out pathways to manage and fund the recommended public art program and assure it aligns with the community's vision.

Analysis of Current Context, Gaps and Opportunities for Collaboration

The Grand River Greenway holds immense potential as a transformative public art corridor, integrating natural beauty, cultural heritage and urban development. However, key challenges currently limit its ability to serve as a premier cultural destination.

Topics listed below are in no particular order.

Key Gaps

- **Lack of Coordination:** The absence of a centralized framework leads to fragmented efforts and inefficiencies in project execution.
- **Unclear Roles and Responsibilities:** Ambiguity in maintenance, funding and governance complicates long-term planning.
- **Limited Cultural Representation:** The many cultures of Grand Rapids are not fully reflected in public art, restricting engagement and historical recognition.
- **Fragmented Funding Sources:** A patchwork approach to funding makes it difficult to sustain long-term initiatives.
- **Educational Gaps:** Public art programming lacks consistency, limiting its reach and impact.
- **Capacity Challenges:** Bureaucratic inefficiencies and low staffing capacity hinder public partners' ability to support art initiatives effectively.
- **Lack of Long-Term Maintenance Planning:** No dedicated funding or framework exists to ensure the ongoing care of existing installations.

Opportunities for Strengthening Public Art in the Greenway

- **Expert Partnerships:** Cultural institutions can enhance public art curation through artist residencies, mentorships and exhibitions.
- **Storytelling:** Expanding partnerships with local artists and cultural organizations can ensure authentic representation and engagement.
- **Educational Integration:** Schools and community programs can incorporate public art into curricula, making art more accessible to students and families.
- **Sustainable Funding:** A dedicated public art fund and a potential percent-for-art program could provide consistent, long-term financial support.
- **Improved Governance and Maintenance:** A more unified leadership model or designated management entity could oversee conservation, maintenance and funding specific to riverfront public art.
- **Economic and Tourism Growth:** Strengthening public art initiatives can drive tourism, attract investment and boost local businesses.
- **Stronger Public-Private Partnerships:** Clearer policies and funding structures can streamline collaboration between City, County and private stakeholders.

Oversight and Community Voice: Grand River Artworks Committee

Grand River Artworks Committee

Current organizations do not have capacity to oversee this work and therefore a new body should be created that provides focused attention on river corridor public art to implement community goals. This new body, the Grand River Artworks Committee, will oversee the implementation of this public art plan and serve as an essential voice of the community for public art on the riverfront. This Committee should represent key stakeholder organizations and professional expertise, ensuring alignment with the community's vision and goals.

Composition

The Committee should include a group of 7-9 professionals from fields such as art, design, urban planning, real estate development, arts funding and the creative sector. The City of Grand Rapids Art Advisory Committee and Kent County should have seats on this body.

Responsibilities

Strategic oversight includes artist selection, project approvals and ensuring all artworks meet safety, accessibility and environmental standards. Additional community input is integrated through artist selection panels and public engagement efforts, as outlined in the artist selection guidelines. Panels will include representatives from communities connected to the artwork's location or purpose. Community engagement will be conducted for select projects to ensure public awareness, meaningful participation and a sense of shared ownership.

Management

Commissioning and maintaining public art are highly technical fields that require professional management based on best practices. This recommended public art program for the Grand River corridor entails additional needs and demands since the corridor is multi-jurisdictional and will involve multiple landowners and partners.

DGRI brings successful experience in managing the complex array of relationships and tasks related to public art. DGRI has made a sustained commitment to public art and staff has developed much of the technical expertise needed to implement this plan. For these reasons, DGRI can manage the riverfront public art through an interim partnership with the Grand River Artworks Committee.



Management Duties Will Involve:

- **Establish and support** the Grand River Public Artworks Committee.
- **Vision Leadership:** Holding and pursuing the community's vision for riverfront public art.
- **Policy Adherence:** Ensuring public art policies and procedures are followed, including project definition, artist calls, selection, contracting, fabrication and installation (detailed in Appendix page 122).
- **Community Engagement:** Co-leading with the Grand River Artworks Committee the selection process with robust community engagement, ensuring meaningful representation and input into art projects.
- **Maintenance and Conservation:** Managing maintenance and conservation of existing and future artworks with financial support from partners and ensuring compliance with artists' rights. DGRI can assure that maintenance issues and costs are addressed for each artwork, with the expectation that the cost of maintenance and conservation will be incorporated into artwork project budgets and/or shared with partners.
- **Funding Management:** Receiving and managing monies for public art. Identifying and pursuing funding opportunities and managing donor relationships.
- **Public Education:** Overseeing public education and promotion of the public art program, coordinating with partner organizations.
- **Impact Measurement:** Measuring the program's impact and providing periodic reports.





Future Management Option

In the future, management of the public art program can be transferred from DGRI to the Grand River Network. DGRI does not intend to permanently manage the program and has a track record of creating initiatives that later become independent. The Grand River Network is currently a nonprofit and could potentially assume management of the public art program.

It has expressed willingness to consider its management as a future option. A transfer to the Grand River Network would be especially advantageous if dedicated funding for greenway development, maintenance and activation can be put in place. This need has been identified in past planning efforts and the Network is currently organizing towards that goal.

Funding

Implementing this plan and fulfilling the community's vision for public art on the riverfront will require an ongoing funding effort. It is recommended that DGRI take on the lead role in fundraising as part of its management responsibilities in partnership with local partners. DGRI can research, plan and solicit diverse contributions from foundations, corporations, individual donors, public grants, developers and others to finance new artworks, as well as their maintenance and conservation. Where there are partners for a specific artwork, they will be encouraged to help strategize and raise the needed funds. It is anticipated that many artworks will be financed by multiple sources.

Partners must also secure funding for the conservation of the existing collection in addition to future artworks. Under this plan, DGRI can collaborate with partners to plan and finance these costs based on location and ownership responsibilities.



Existing Funding Challenges

The current funding approach for public art is fragmented and opportunistic. Public art on the river (and elsewhere in Grand Rapids) has often been funded by private sources. DGRI has also funded multiple art projects (often small scale and/or temporary) through its activation budget. The City and County do not have percent-for-art programs and only occasionally have helped finance public artworks.

Stakeholders have consistently articulated the desire for greater community involvement and “ownership” of public art, as well as artwork that reflects the culture, identities, communities and heritage of the riverfront. The Grand River Equity Framework acknowledges this reality and calls for the creation of a fundraising effort that can finance riverfront artworks with greater community involvement. The policies and procedures recommended in this plan call for shared decision-making and community engagement to fulfill this approach.

Proposed Funding Approach

The recommended funding approach creates a more intentional, community-oriented public art process by encouraging diverse financial support. It will continue to seek grant support at local, state and federal levels as opportunities are available. It will leverage multiple public and private funding sources to finance both art creation and ongoing maintenance needs. This collaborative model expands resources beyond DGRI’s geographic boundaries, making projects possible in areas that would otherwise be ineligible. The approach builds upon Grand Rapids’ established practice of forming funding partnerships for larger-scale art installations, ensuring broader community participation and sustainability.

Ensuring Maintenance and Conservation

As noted in Management, maintenance and conservation costs should be included in all art project budgets to ensure resources and an agreement is in place to address these needs. A general guideline is to add 20% of the costs of an artwork to the overall project budget for maintenance and conservation. In addition, efforts should be made to secure contributions towards maintenance and conservation of existing artworks on the riverfront.

Long-Term Strategy: Exploring a Percent-for-Art Program

In the long term, exploring the possibility of a percent-for-art program is recommended to establish a consistent and efficient funding mechanism for art on public property (see Suggestions for City and County Government, below). Such programs - proven successful in other communities leading on arts and culture - include a policy requiring a percentage of a public or private development project’s budget to be allocated for public art. This approach would help provide a more sustainable framework for integrating art into the riverfront’s future development projects. Together, these strategies offer both immediate and lasting support for a vibrant and sustainable public art program.

Staffing

DGRI will need sufficient staff resources to fulfill the management role for public art. In addition to its current staffing, additional needs are:

- **Public Art Curator:** Liaising between DGRI, artists and stakeholders to ensure technical and artistic excellence in projects.
- **Professional Development Staff:** Overseeing funding relationships and identifying opportunities.
- **Conservation Expert:** Conducting or overseeing the conservation of artworks. Note that Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park uses a highly qualified conservator.



Suggestions for City and County Government

The Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan was commissioned by the DDA and managed by DGRI with full acknowledgement of the multi-jurisdictional nature of riverfront public art. Both the City of Grand Rapids and Kent County participated actively in the planning process and expressed interest in the consultants' ideas about assuring successful public art along the river. Still, local governments are not parties to the planning contract and did not officially solicit recommendations regarding their art policies.

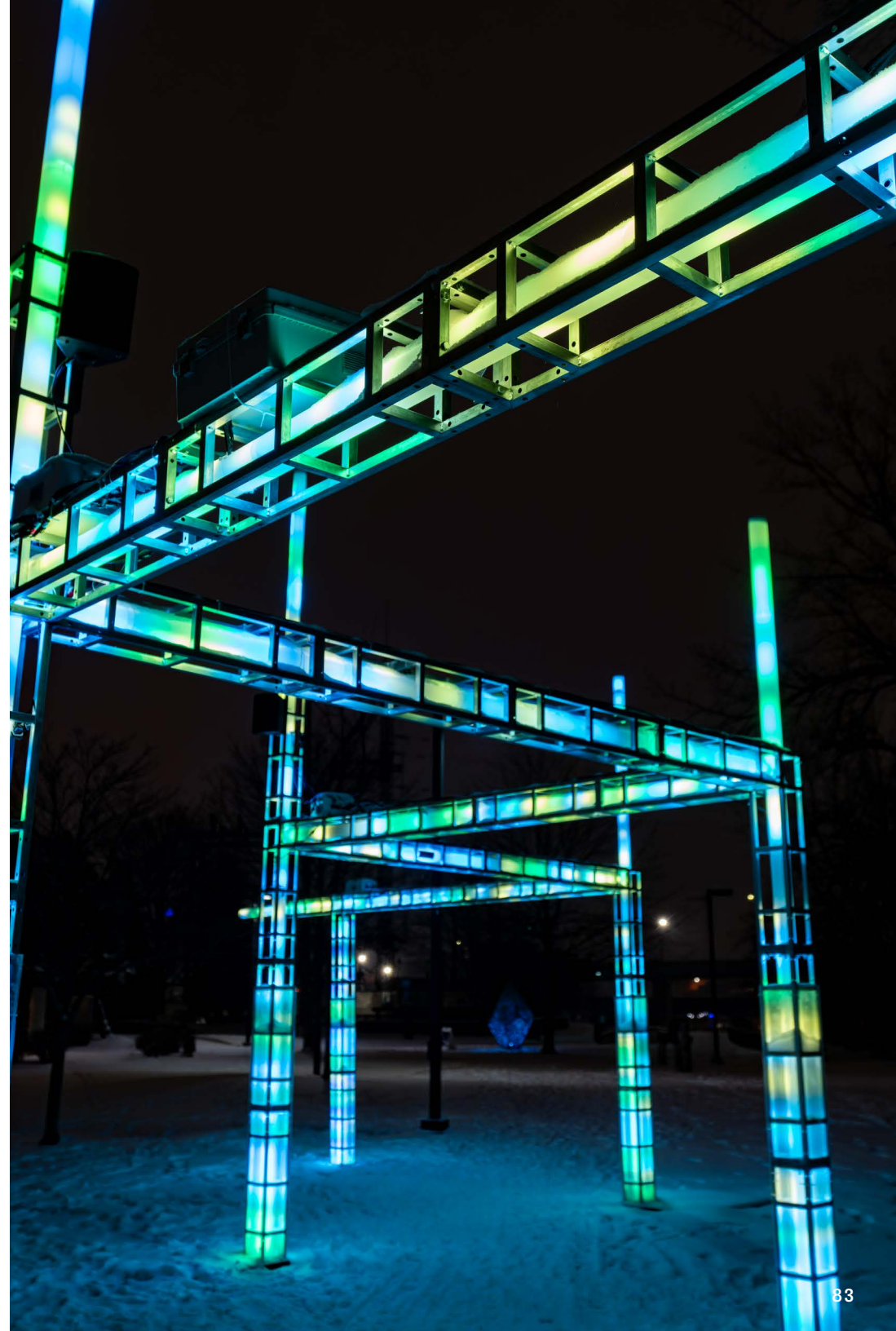
The following suggestions are offered as possibilities for the City and County to consider. These options would strengthen each jurisdiction's capacities to provide quality public art for their citizens. Expanding their art programs could also engender increased quality of life, economic growth and tourism. These initiatives can promote wellbeing, community pride, celebration of heritage and history, placemaking and other vital community interests.

Suggestions for the City of Grand Rapids

- Explore the feasibility of establishing a **percent-for-art program** for City capital improvement projects, dedicating funds to public art. Develop a public art program to guide investment of percent-for-art revenue.
- Create dedicated staff position(s) focused on **public art management** to ensure proper oversight of existing assets and implementation of expanded art initiatives.
- Expand the **incentive-based, voluntary public art program** for private real estate development near the river and encourage developer use of this option. Offer technical assistance to support the inclusion of art in projects.
- Explore the feasibility for a **percent-for-art** program for private development projects along the river corridor.
- Transform the **Art Advisory Committee** to address broader arts and cultural issues.
- Support the work of Arts and Culture Collective of Grand Rapids in developing a **community cultural plan and dedicated arts funding**.

Suggestions for Kent County

- Explore the feasibility of establishing a **percent-for-art program** for County capital improvement projects, dedicating funds to public art.
- Create dedicated staff position(s) for public art management to coordinate **County-wide initiatives** and maintain program quality.
- Develop a **community cultural plan** in partnership with regional arts organizations to align with regional goals and explore dedicated funding options.



Roles and Responsibilities

The Roles and Responsibilities section establishes a clear framework for the development, execution and long-term sustainability of the public art program. It defines the roles of key stakeholders—DGRI, City and County government, property owners and other relevant partners—in curating artworks, implementing projects, managing logistics and operations, securing funding and ensuring maintenance and conservation.

Additional partners, such as local arts institutions, community organizations, private developers and Indigenous representatives, may be involved in specific projects, providing expertise, funding or cultural guidance.

By delineating responsibilities, this structure promotes collaboration, accountability and strategic alignment with the goals of the public art plan. A well-defined approach ensures that public art remains an integral and sustainable part of the Grand River Corridor, fostering cultural expression, community pride and long-term stewardship.



Roles and Responsibilities

ENTITY	OVERSIGHT	FUNDING	IMPLEMENTATION	CURATION	MAINTENANCE
Grand River Artworks Committee (recommended)	Provides strategic oversight and community voice to ensure all projects align with the goals and guidelines of the Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan and regional cultural initiatives.	Advises on and collaborates to develop sustainable funding strategies, including percent-for-art programs and private-public partnerships.	Guides artist selection processes to reflect artistic excellence, cultural sensitivity and community engagement, while formally approving proposed projects for the Greenway.	Ensures broad participation in curation by prioritizing all voices and cultural representation, while maintaining consistency with the broader public art vision.	Establishes and enforces comprehensive guidelines for long-term conservation and maintenance needs, ensuring the longevity of installed artworks.
Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. (DGRI)	Manages and holds the vision for the riverfront public art program in partnership with the Grand River Artworks Committee.	Sources, manages and secures public and private funding streams, establishing sustainable financial support for public art initiatives.	With oversight of the Grand River Artworks Committee, approves and monitors public art projects to ensure compliance with City, County and curatorial guidelines, fostering consistency across installations.	Implements and upholds curatorial standards and vision in collaboration with the Grand River Artworks Committee, ensuring broad representation, artistic excellence and alignment with community values.	Coordinates maintenance responsibilities for public artworks, leveraging financial support from property owners, partners and public funds to ensure long-term conservation and care.
Grand River Network	Leads coordination of the broader Greenway trail development alongside partners to ensure integration of public art and cultural elements along the trail corridor.	Actively supports funding initiatives by collaborating with City, County and private partners to secure resources for public art and trail enhancements.	Serves as a potential future program manager, coordinating public art efforts within the Greenway and aligning them with regional cultural objectives.	Collaborates with the Grand River Artworks Committee, DGRI and other stakeholders to uphold curatorial standards and ensure artworks align with the Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan.	This plan aligns with the Grand River Network Operations & Maintenance Study and anticipates the development of a specialized conservation plan for artworks, fostering improved coordination among agencies.
City of Grand Rapids	Ensures alignment with the City's public art and cultural plans through dedicated arts management staff, particularly for projects within prominent viewsheds and along priority corridors like the Grand River.	Develops funding mechanisms to consistently support public artworks, transitioning from occasional contributions to a more sustainable funding model.	Assures appropriate staffing to participate in implementation efforts for City-based projects in partnership with DGRI and other stakeholders.	Collaborates with DGRI and the Grand River Artworks Committee to curate artworks in alignment with the guidelines, including final approval by the Arts Advisory Committee, promoting a unified approach to public art on the riverfront.	Coordinates with DGRI and funds the maintenance and conservation of artworks on City property. Where appropriate, City staff can assist with regular maintenance.

ENTITY	OVERSIGHT	FUNDING	IMPLEMENTATION	CURATION	MAINTENANCE
Kent County	Provides oversight for public art projects located on County property through dedicated arts management staff, ensuring alignment with regional cultural and public art goals outlined in the community cultural plan.	Establishes funding strategies to provide consistent financial support for County-based projects, reducing reliance on ad-hoc contributions.	Assures appropriate staffing to participate in implementation efforts for projects on County properties, such as Millennium Park, in partnership with DGRI and other stakeholders.	Collaborates with DGRI and the Grand River Artworks Committee to curate artworks in alignment with the guidelines, promoting a unified approach to public art on the riverfront.	Coordinates with DGRI and funds the maintenance and conservation of artworks on County property. Where appropriate, County staff can assist with regular maintenance.
Property Owners	Ensure artworks align with the guidelines and vision established in the Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan, contributing to a cohesive cultural and visual identity for the river corridor.	Actively contribute funding for public art projects on their property, leveraging incentives where available and share responsibility for ongoing maintenance costs to ensure long-term sustainability.	Collaborate with the Grand River Artworks Committee and ensuring project approval aligns with both City and County oversight requirements.	Collaborate with the Grand River Artworks Committee, DGRI and other stakeholders to uphold curatorial standards that reflect artistic excellence, cultural representation and alignment with the broader public art plan.	Coordinate with DGRI to secure the regular maintenance and conservation of artworks on their property, supported by clear agreements and processes.
Grand Rapids Arts and Educational Organizations	Grand Rapids arts organizations and education institutions voluntarily participate in specific art projects with particular relevance to their missions and locations, in collaboration with DGRI and the Grand River Artworks Committee.	Assist with securing needed funds and other resources for projects.	Participate in oversight and community voice processes, incorporating input from the Grand River Artworks Committee and ensuring project approval aligns with both City and County oversight requirements.	Collaborate with the Grand River Artworks Committee, DGRI and other stakeholders to uphold curatorial standards that reflect artistic excellence, cultural representation and alignment with the broader public art plan.	Coordinate with DGRI to secure the regular maintenance and conservation of artworks, supported by clear agreements and processes.

Note: Coordination with the Grand Rapids Arts and Culture Collective and Future Planning Efforts: This Public Art Plan was developed in close coordination with the Arts and Culture Collective to ensure alignment with ongoing regional arts priorities and initiatives. As the City and County advance their own cultural planning efforts, this plan is intended to be complementary—not competitive—providing a focused framework specifically for public art along the Grand River corridor

MONITORING AND EVALUATION



Measuring the Impact of Public Art

Reporting and Feedback Mechanisms

Measuring the Impact of Public Art

Measuring the success of public art requires evaluating both its quantifiable benefits and intangible effects on neighborhoods, residents and visitors. This section outlines possible metrics for assessing the community, economic and cultural impact of public art to ensure alignment with existing data reporting from organizations such as DGRI, City and County, the Arts and Culture Collective of Grand Rapids and the Grand River Equity Framework.

By combining quantitative metrics and qualitative insights, partners can capture the multi-dimensional value of public art installations to provide a clear understanding of their effectiveness. This analysis not only helps justify ongoing investment but also informs improvements for future projects.

According to CODAworx's The Economics of Public Art report, \$1.7 billion was awarded to artists for commissions and \$1.8 billion to fabricators and other suppliers in 2023. Of these commissions, 29% were for public spaces, plazas and parks—with 71% of those being permanent works.

Public art impact is found through tourism, urban revitalization, infrastructure and public health. CODAworx says, "Public art is a gateway to the soul of a community, especially for visitors experiencing a destination for the first time." A study done by ArtPlace America found that incorporating art into public space leads to greater foot traffic and economic activity, which benefits businesses that own or operate near these spaces. For example, the Piazza Rosa installation by Perer Fink in Italy, brought a 400% rise in economic activity within their district once installed. Their research shows that art installations can increase surrounding property values by 20-35%.



Local Economic Impact

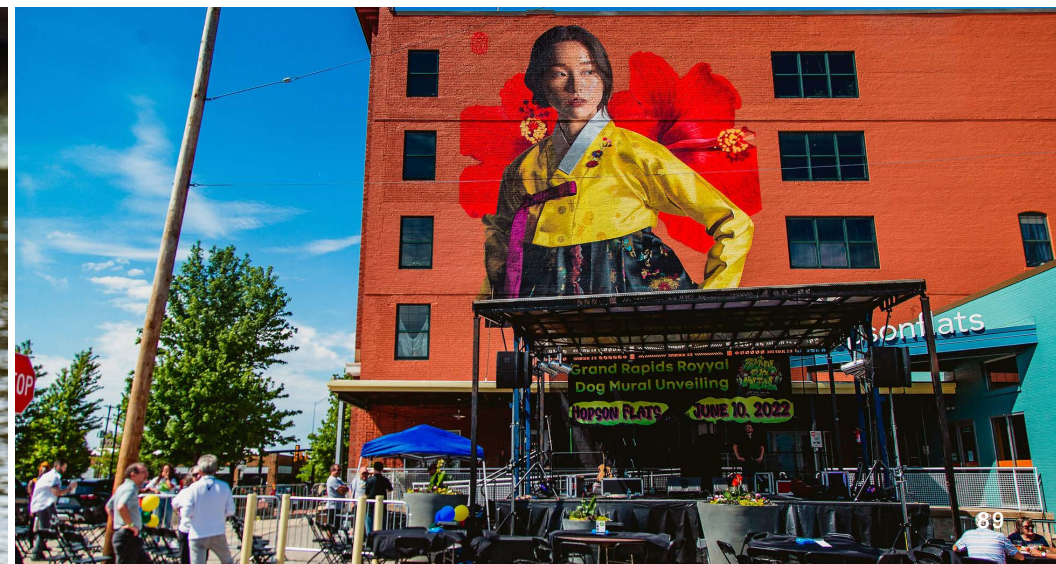
Besides the economic financial benefit, on a local level, public art can create public engagement and cultural identity. CODAworx¹¹ research states that globally funding resources for commissioned works come from 39% City/County government, 12% developer incentives, 7% federal government, 6% donations, 7% grants/foundations, 5% hotel/motel tax, 3% non-profits, 1% coming from other taxes and 20% from other resources. 28% of those projects were funded from private developers tax which equivalates to a 1.2% requirement for private developers to set aside funds in their budget for local art.

Public art is evolving, finding new ways to engage in conversations, giving a sense of place and community stewardship over spaces, thus creating cultural enrichment. Many organizations and institutions are doing just that locally here today.

The Arts and Culture Collective of Grand Rapids (ACCGR), supported by the 2024 City of Grand Rapids Commissioners, KConnect and the Seidman College of Business at Grand Valley State University, has released a comprehensive economic impact study¹² highlighting the significant contributions of the City's arts and cultural sector. This study, which analyzed 33 arts and culture organizations in greater Grand Rapids, underscores how the non-profit arts and culture sector serves as a powerful driver of both community vibrancy and economic growth in our community.

The study reveals that the organizations that participated in the study generate over \$300 million in economic impact annually.

These institutions attract approximately 1.3 million out-of-town visitors each year to the greater Grand Rapids area and employ 2,500 individuals.



CORE METRICS FOR EVALUATING SUCCESS

1. Community Engagement and Perception

Public art's success is closely tied to how well it resonates with the community. Metrics include:

Visitor Counts

Use activity trackers to track the number of people visiting public art sites.

Social Media Engagement

Analyze shares, mentions, hashtag usage and online discussions related to public art.

Community Surveys

Gather public feedback to gauge awareness, perception and satisfaction.

Resident Interviews

Capture individual stories and experiences with public art installations.

Community Participation

Track meaningful engagement of community stakeholders in the planning, selection, and implementation processes.

Attendance at Events

Track participation in festivals, tours and other art-related activities.



2. Economic and Cultural Impact

Public art should contribute to the City's economic growth and cultural identity. Metrics include:

Economic Indicators

Evaluate revenue trends for businesses near installations and changes in property values in surrounding neighborhoods.

Tourism Data

Measure visitor numbers, length of stay and spending attributed to public art attractions.

Recognition and Awards

Monitor media coverage, awards and partnerships positioning Grand Rapids as a public art destination.

Income for Artists

Analyze income generated for local artists through public art projects.

Benefit-Cost Ratios

Examine the balance between investment in public art and its broader economic returns.



3. Social and Cultural Impact

Public art should foster social interaction, cultural dialogue and community pride. Metrics include:

Crime Rates

Assess changes in crime near installations, as public art often activates and revitalizes public spaces.

Community Gatherings

Track the frequency and scale of community events at or near public art sites.

Cultural Interactions

Measure cross-cultural engagement during events featuring temporary or culturally specific artworks.

Educational Participation

Monitor attendance in art-related educational programs and workshops.

Volunteer Involvement

Track the number of volunteers engaged in art-related initiatives.



4. Implementation Considerations

Alignment with Partner Data

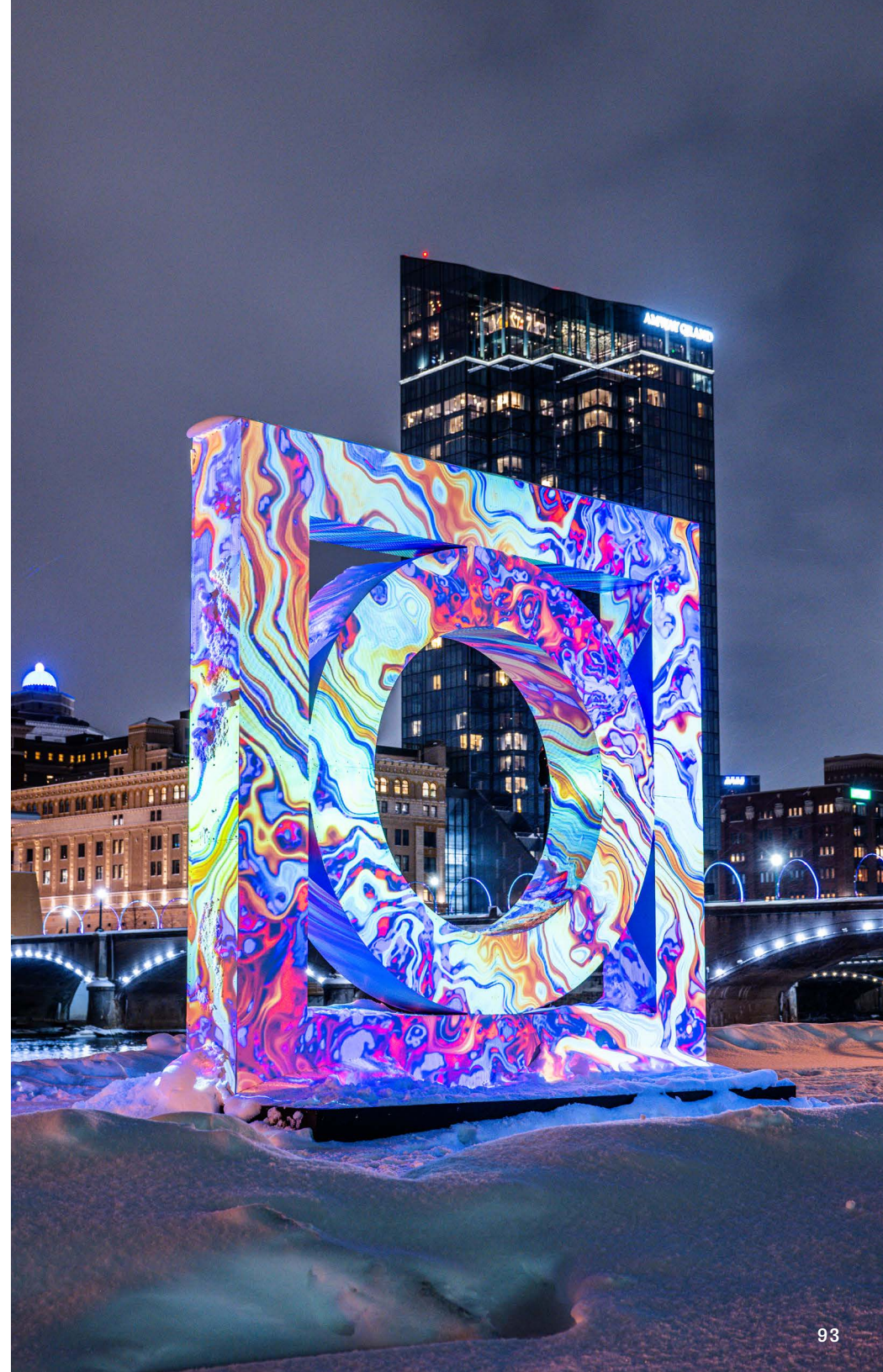
Metrics should align with existing reporting structures from organizations such as DGRI and the City to ensure consistency and comparability.

Annual Reviews

Regular assessments by the Grand River Artworks Committee can identify trends, inform strategic adjustments and highlight successes.

Transparent Reporting

Sharing results with stakeholders fosters accountability and demonstrates the program's value.



By focusing on community engagement, economic impact and social transformation, these metrics will provide a holistic understanding of how public art enriches the Grand River corridor. This process ensures that public art continues to be a dynamic force in Grand Rapids' cultural and economic landscape.



Reporting and Feedback Mechanisms

Robust reporting and feedback mechanisms are essential for ensuring transparency, accountability and continuous improvement of the public art program. These tools foster community trust, provide insights for strategic adjustments and demonstrate the program's value to stakeholders.

Key Mechanisms for Reporting and Feedback:

1. Annual Reports

- Publish a comprehensive yearly overview of the program's achievements, including:
 - » Project highlights and milestones
 - » Community impacts and engagement statistics
 - » Financial summaries detailing expenditures, funding sources and sustainability planning
- These reports provide a transparent record of progress and align with partner reporting requirements

2. Performance Dashboards

- Develop digital tools to track and visualize program metrics in real time.
- Dashboards offer stakeholders an accessible way to monitor progress, with insights into:
 - » Visitor counts, social media engagement and funding updates
 - » Maintenance schedules and conservation efforts

3. Community Engagement Feedback

- Regularly solicit input from residents, businesses and artists through:
 - » Surveys, town halls and focus groups
 - » Public forums centered on new installations or proposed projects
- Feedback ensures that the public art program reflects community sentiment and addresses evolving needs

4. Artist Evaluations

- Incorporate feedback from participating artists to:
 - » Understand challenges faced during project execution
 - » Identify opportunities for improving processes and enhancing creative outcomes
- These evaluations help foster creative excellence and support artists' ongoing involvement

5. Advisory Reviews

- Convene the Grand River Artworks Committee for periodic reviews of program performance
- The Committee provides recommendations for strategic adjustments, ensuring alignment with overarching goals and metrics

6. Public Art Website

- Maintain an up-to-date online platform to:
 - » Showcase installed works, share project updates and highlight upcoming opportunities
 - » Integrate interactive feedback portals to capture ongoing community input
- The website serves as a central hub for information and engagement, fostering transparency and accessibility

Ensuring Alignment and Improvement

By integrating rigorous evaluation, strong accountability, transparent reporting and active feedback loops, the public art program will:

- Demonstrate its value and impact to the community and stakeholders
- Adapt to meet evolving needs and capitalize on emerging opportunities
- Foster a culture of continuous improvement that ensures public art remains a key element of Grand Rapids cultural development

This integrated approach ensures that the Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan is not only well-documented and accountable but also dynamic and responsive, evolving alongside the community it serves

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Short to Mid-Term Implementation



Short to Mid-Term Implementation

Note: This short-term implementation table is intended as a flexible guide. Actions beyond Year 3 will be determined annually by DGRI in coordination with stakeholders. Budget figures are working estimates and subject to revision.

TYPE	ITEM	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	ESTIMATED BUDGET	KEY DELIVERABLES
Management	Establish Public Art Implementation Team.	Form a cross-sector Implementation Team made up of DGRI staff, public agency partners, curatorial advisors and key stakeholders to oversee execution of the Public Art Plan.	DGRI/transition to Grand River Artworks Committee	Allocation of staff time plus (5) \$2,500 stipends.	Established Implementation Team roster with defined roles, monthly meetings for the first six months followed by quarterly check-ins, documented meeting notes with action trackers and a mid-year review memo outlining progress and recommended adjustments.
Management	Operationalize DGRI as manager of the Public Art Plan.	Detail next steps for DGRI to implement and oversee public art projects.	DGRI	Staff costs as identified below, plus operating costs.	Program plan and budget for DGRI's role in implementing the Public Art Plan.
Management	Establish the Grand River Artworks Committee to provide oversight, site curation and community voice.	Form a 7-9 member oversight body with relevant expertise and representation.	DGRI with agreement of partners (City, County, others)	Allocation of staff time.	Governance materials (statement of purpose and authority, position description, etc.) Presentations to partners, e.g., City, County, other organizations.
Management	Develop a plan for the maintenance and conservation of current and future artworks.	Assess current collection needs and anticipated future artworks, develop maintenance and conservation action plan and budget.	DGRI	Allocation of maintenance/conservation contractor's time. ArcGIS platform subscription or license.	Create an interactive ArcGIS dashboard to map artwork locations, track condition assessments, maintenance schedules and conservation histories. Use the dashboard as a shared tool for coordination between DGRI, City staff and conservation contractors.

TYPE	ITEM	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	ESTIMATED BUDGET	KEY DELIVERABLES
Management	Establish a project management system.	Select and implement an online platform for project and collections management (e.g., Public Art Archive).	DGRI	\$2,500-\$5,000 per year for software subscription allocation of staff time to inventory collection.	Implemented software platform.
Funding	Establish a Public Art Fund, sourcing from foundations, corporations, grants and developers.	Initiate and promote a long-term fundraising effort to fund public art on the river.	DGRI	Salary for development staff.	Management plan and marketing materials for the fundraising effort.
Funding	Establish initial funder relationships.	Identify funding prospects, assess current interests and relationships and establish funder contacts/relationships.	DGRI	Allocation of development staff time.	Funder engagement and relationships.
Funding	Establish a maintenance fund within the overall development effort and public art fund.	Include maintenance and conservation costs for existing and future collection.	DGRI, City, County and other partners	Costs to be developed for current and future collection.	Maintenance and conservation assessment and plan.
Funding	Launch a capital campaign to fund permanent works identified in this plan.	Initiate a major fundraising campaign dedicated to the procurement, fabrication and installation of permanent, high-impact public artworks along the Grand River corridor.	DGRI/ Grand River Network and professional development staff	\$8-13 million. Target includes artist fees, fabrication, installation, permitting, engineering and maintenance and conservation reserves.	Capital campaign case statement and materials, formation of a fundraising committee, secured commitments from lead donors or institutional partners and the procurement and installation of permanent, high-impact public artworks along the Grand River corridor.

TYPE	ITEM	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	ESTIMATED BUDGET	KEY DELIVERABLES
Funding	Explore feasibility of a percent-for-art programs at both the City and County levels to establish dedicated, consistent funding for public art.	The goal is to secure a dedicated funding stream by allocating a fixed percentage (typically 1%) of capital improvement project budgets toward public art.	DGRI & partners (Arts and Culture Collective, City and County administration)	Pursuing percent-for-art programs at the City and County levels may require an estimated budget of \$12,500 to \$37,500, depending on the scope of research, engagement, and outreach efforts.	Deliverables include a policy memo and draft ordinance, stakeholder briefings and support letters, presentations to City and County officials, a public-facing campaign and a detailed advocacy timeline.
Funding	Apply for state & federal grants.	Identify non-local funding prospects.	DGRI	Allocation of staff time, potential travel costs.	Prospect list and funding proposals.
Funding	Clarify and communicate existing public art guidelines for developers.	Conduct a thorough review of current public art policies, developer expectations and voluntary contribution mechanisms. Create a concise, user-friendly Public Art Policy Toolkit that spells out existing requirements and options for supporting public art along the Grand River corridor.	DGRI, City and County planning staff	Staff time, legal review.	Deliverables include a print and digital Public Art Policy Toolkit for Developers, at least three developer briefings or info sessions and a summary of current development projects with public art potential along the Grand River corridor.
Staffing	Hire/contract a public art curator.	Manage the public art program and oversee projects, curation and artist relations.	DGRI	Salary Range: \$60,000-\$80,000 per year.	Position description.
Staffing	Hire/contract a development professional.	Create a development program to fund public art on the river.	DGRI	Salary Range: \$100,000-\$120,000 per year.	Position description.
Staffing	Hire/contract conservation manager.	Plan and implement long-term maintenance and conservation for current and future artworks.	DGRI	Salary Range: \$50,000-\$65,000 per year.	RFQ and selection process.

TYPE	ITEM	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	ESTIMATED BUDGET	KEY DELIVERABLES
Communications	Public awareness campaign.	Launch a dedicated website featuring interactive maps, artist interviews and project updates.	DGRI, City, County and other partners.	\$5,000-\$10,000 website development.	Grand River public artworks website.
Communications	Launch campaign to further education and awareness about public art.	Develop social media and email newsletters to engage the public.	DGRI, City, County and other partners.	Integrate into DGRI social channels.	Social media content.
Communications	Collaborate with GVSU to develop a public art wayfinding & visitor experience app.	Partner with GVSU to co-develop a mobile app or digital platform that enhances the visitor experience of the Grand River public art program. The app will include interactive wayfinding features, artist information, audio/video content and accessibility tools, helping users explore the artworks and riverfront with context and ease.	DGRI, GVSU faculty and students, Grand River Artworks Committee, GIS and communications.	Estimated \$25,000-\$40,000, depending on the scope and GIS/dashboard integration, with potential cost offsets through a GVSU partnership or external grants.	Prototype or MVP of the mobile app featuring a map-based interface and curated art content, followed by pilot testing with users and integration of feedback.
Public Art Procurement	Launch pilot temporary artworks (1-2 years) to activate riverfront nodes.	These installations will test public engagement strategies, refine site logistics and inform long-term curatorial planning.	DGRI, ArtPrize, Arts and Culture Collective, Grand River Artworks Committee.	\$100,000-\$150,000 over two years.	5-6 temporary installations placed along the riverfront over 24 months. Evaluation summary to guide future procurement strategy and permanent placement planning.
Public Art Procurement	Establish annual acquisition program for permanent artworks from major festivals.	Develop a program to acquire one permanent artwork selected from standout temporary installations featured in ArtPrize or World of Winter each year.	DGRI, ArtPrize, Arts and Culture Collective, Grand River Artworks Committee.	\$50,000-\$100,000 per year/annually to match.	8-10 permanent public artworks installed along the Grand River corridor.

TYPE	ITEM	DESCRIPTION	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	ESTIMATED BUDGET	KEY DELIVERABLES
Public Art Procurement	Issue first RFQs/RFPs using site-specific criteria.	Each call will be tailored to specific priority sites identified in the Placement Plan, with defined curatorial goals, budget ranges, site conditions and community context. RFQs/RFPs will be issued on a rolling basis, timed to occur 12–18 months in advance of each site’s construction completion, ensuring sufficient time for artist selection, design development and coordination with capital project timelines.	DGRI, Grand River Artworks Committee	Covered under existing staff and consultant fees.	8–10 site-specific RFQs/RFPs.
Public Art Procurement	Create and maintain a comprehensive artist database featuring local, national and international artists qualified for public art commissions.	The database will include each artist’s contact information, artistic medium(s), price range, geographic location, portfolio samples and relevant project experience.	DGRI, Grand River Artworks Committee	Covered under existing staff and consultant fees.	Live, searchable artist database accessible to DGRI and curatorial partners

APPENDICES

Context and Background

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Current Art Collection on the Grand River Greenway

Benchmark Cities

Policies and Procedure

Operational Workflow and Decision-Making Process

Public Art ToolKit: Sample Documents and Tools

Glossary of Terms

References

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Context and Background

Relationship with Public Art Plan to Other Community Efforts

The Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan is part of a broader movement to revitalize the Grand River corridor, aligning with long-standing civic efforts to enhance public spaces and celebrate cultural heritage. While past municipal and community plans have recognized the role of public art, implementation has been fragmented. This plan seeks to bridge that gap, integrating public art into ongoing investments while ensuring alignment with broader urban, cultural and environmental strategies.

Key Community Plans Informing the Public Art Plan

The public art plan builds insights from multiple City and regional plans, ensuring that art installations reflect Grand Rapids' broader vision for economic development, sustainability and inclusivity:

- **Grand River Corridor Implementation Plan and Trail Design Guidelines “A River For All” (2018)**: Highlights public art as essential for creating a cohesive riverfront identity, calling for strategic site selection, sustainable practices and educational programming.
- **City of Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2017 and 2022)**²: Emphasizes enhancing riverfront parks through public art to activate spaces and create unique identities.
- **GR Forward Downtown and River Action Plan (2015)**³: Positions public art as a tool for community engagement, tourism and economic development while addressing challenges like funding, placement and long-term maintenance.
- **Grand River Corridor Equity Framework (2023)**⁴: Calls for culturally responsive, community-driven public art that reflects the City's many voices.

- **Green Grand Rapids (2012)**⁵: Advocates for integrating public art with green infrastructure to create vibrant community hubs.
- **Bridge to Our Future**⁶: Grand Rapids Community Master Plan (2024) – Identifies “Vibrancy” and “Culture” as Citywide priorities, positioning public art as central to placemaking and economic resilience.
- **Arts and Culture Collective of Grand Rapids Economic Impact Study (2024)**⁷

These plans reinforce the need for a coordinated approach to public art that enhances the Grand River's identity, connects communities and aligns with broader sustainability and cultural preservation efforts.

Community Input: Priorities and Perspectives

Public engagement over the years across a number of projects and planning efforts has underscored the importance of creating a public art program that is inclusive, culturally significant and sustainable. Key takeaways include:

- **Anishinaabek and Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians (2018, 2022)**: Calls for integrating Indigenous history and culture through murals, sculptures and interpretive elements. Recommendations emphasize tribal collaboration, traditional design elements and educational programming.
- **Grand River Greenway Engagement (2024)**: Highlights the need for long-term maintenance and conservation strategies, community education on public art processes and site selection that balances artistic vision with public accessibility.

Moving Forward: A Comprehensive Public Art Strategy

The Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan is grounded in community input, existing efforts, and the region's vast cultural landscape. It aims to ensure future artworks are visually compelling, culturally meaningful, environmentally sustainable, and economically beneficial. By aligning public art with broader revitalization efforts, the plan seeks to transform the Grand River corridor into a dynamic cultural landmark that reflects the identity and aspirations of Grand Rapids and Kent County residents.

History of Public Art on the Grand River

The Grand River, Michigan's longest river, stretches from its spring-fed origins near Jackson to its endpoint at Lake Michigan. As it flowed through Grand Rapids, it served as a natural artery and a cultural and historical landmark, shaping the development of the community. Public art along this corridor can play a vital role in reflecting Indigenous roots, immigrant history and ongoing efforts toward river restoration. Riverside and Millennium Parks, situated at the north and south ends of Grand Rapids' urban core, provided key anchoring sites to concentrate and unify a cohesive public art program, reinforcing the river's significance as both a natural and cultural asset.

The Ancient Formation of the Grand River

Over 13,000 years ago, melting glaciers of the Wisconsin Ice Age carved the Grand River's path, creating a dynamic waterway that reshaped the land and defined the region. The river's ancient origins, shifting channels and glacial history provide a backdrop for understanding its deep ecological and cultural significance to those who have lived along its banks for thousands of years.

The Indigenous Legacy and Public Art

Indigenous communities, including the Anishinaabe people, revered the river, known as Gitchi-zibi (Great River) or Owashtanong (Far Flowing Water), as a vital resource for sustenance, spirituality and connection. The People of the Three Fires—the Ojibwe (Chippewa), Odawa (Ottawa) and Bodewadmi (Potawatomi) Nations—gathered along its banks for trade, governance and ceremonial life.

The Grand River was not only a physical lifeline but also a spiritual and cultural one, where wampum belts and ceremonies were exchanged to forge alliances and affirm unity.

Public art installations along the river, such as those at Ah-Nab-Awen Park, honor the Anishinaabe connection to the land and water. Historically, this site was home to the Converse Mounds, which contained copper and mica artifacts, demonstrating the area's importance as a sacred gathering space before the mounds were destroyed in the 19th century. Today, public art serves as a way to reclaim narratives, acknowledge past erasures and destruction of the mounds and preserve Indigenous traditions.

Displacement and Resilience

In 1821, the Treaty of Chicago enabled the U.S. government to forcibly remove Anishinaabe nations from their ancestral lands along the Grand River. Following a series of displacements through multiple treaties, Native boarding schools sought to erase Indigenous identity by imposing colonial ways of life on First Peoples. Additionally, federal policies continue to enforce segregation by requiring Indigenous individuals to identify with only one tribe, despite their connections to multiple tribal lineages. Regardless of forced removal, cultural erasure and lack of tribal recognition, the Anishinaabe people have preserved their deep ties to the land, sustaining their heritage through storytelling, ceremonies and ongoing advocacy.

The annual Homecoming of the Three Fires Pow Wow continues to celebrate this legacy, echoing historic gatherings where treaties were negotiated and unity was reaffirmed. The presence of the sacred fire that was lit at the first gathering for the Three Fires Pow Wow in the 1800's was never meant to be put out, but to burn forever as a symbol of resilience of the Anishinaabe people.

Future public art projects along the river trail, including interpretive sculptures, installations and culturally-informed design elements, aim to honor Anishinaabe stories, traditions and environmental stewardship practices. These efforts will ensure that the river remains a space of historical recognition, cultural expression and ongoing reconciliation.

Immigrant Influence and Historical Highlights

The first Europeans to settle along the Grand River were French missionaries, beginning with Fr. Frederic Baraga, who established the Mission of St. Mary in 1833. Following his arrival, numerous other missionaries settled along the river, seeking to alter Indigenous ways of life and thought. In 1835, Rix Robinson became the first non-missionary white settler in the area, establishing himself as the region's first fur trader. The arrival of missionaries, fur traders, and settlers in the early 19th century introduced new dynamics to the river and its surrounding communities.

Louis Campau and Lucius Lyon, early settlers and rivals, shaped the City's layout in dividing it into distinct sections that were influenced by Indigenous trails and French-style streets. Their impact, visible in Grand Rapids' unique City grid, highlights the layered history of land use along the river.

The Industrial Era and Its Artistic Echoes

During the Industrial Era, Grand Rapids became a hub for manufacturing powered by the Grand River. Bridges, steamboats and industry transformed the river into a bustling corridor for transportation and trade. However, the exploitation of the river through dredging, damming and deforestation greatly altered the landscape and diminished the river's natural function and character.

Contemporary public art reflects on this industrial legacy, often emphasizing themes of environmental restoration. Edwin Anderson's *Grand Legacy* mural (Ah-Nab-Awen Park, 2023) captures this duality, featuring scenes of fishing, kayaking and community interaction alongside reminders of the river's past.

Public Art as a Reflection of Identity

In the 1960s and 70s, Grand Rapids embraced public art as a way to cement its civic identity. Landmark installations like Alexander Calder's *La Grande Vitesse*—one of the first projects funded by the National Endowment for the Arts—established the City's commitment to large-scale, site-specific art. Similarly, Joseph Kinnebrew IV's *Fish Ladder* transformed functional infrastructure into an artistic and ecological statement, reconnecting the river with its natural inhabitants.

Maya Lin's *Ecliptic*, completed in 2001, expanded this tradition by integrating art with landscape and public space. Inspired by the City's name and the movement of water in all its forms, *Ecliptic* transformed Downtown Grand Rapids into an interactive environment, inviting people to engage with both the artwork and the natural elements that define the City.

These artworks are not just aesthetic landmarks; they are cultural signposts, each offering a perspective on Grand Rapids' past, present and future. By acknowledging immigrant influence and historical highlights through public art, the City continues to celebrate the cultures, industry and creativity that have long shaped its relationship with the Grand River.

Political and Physical Context

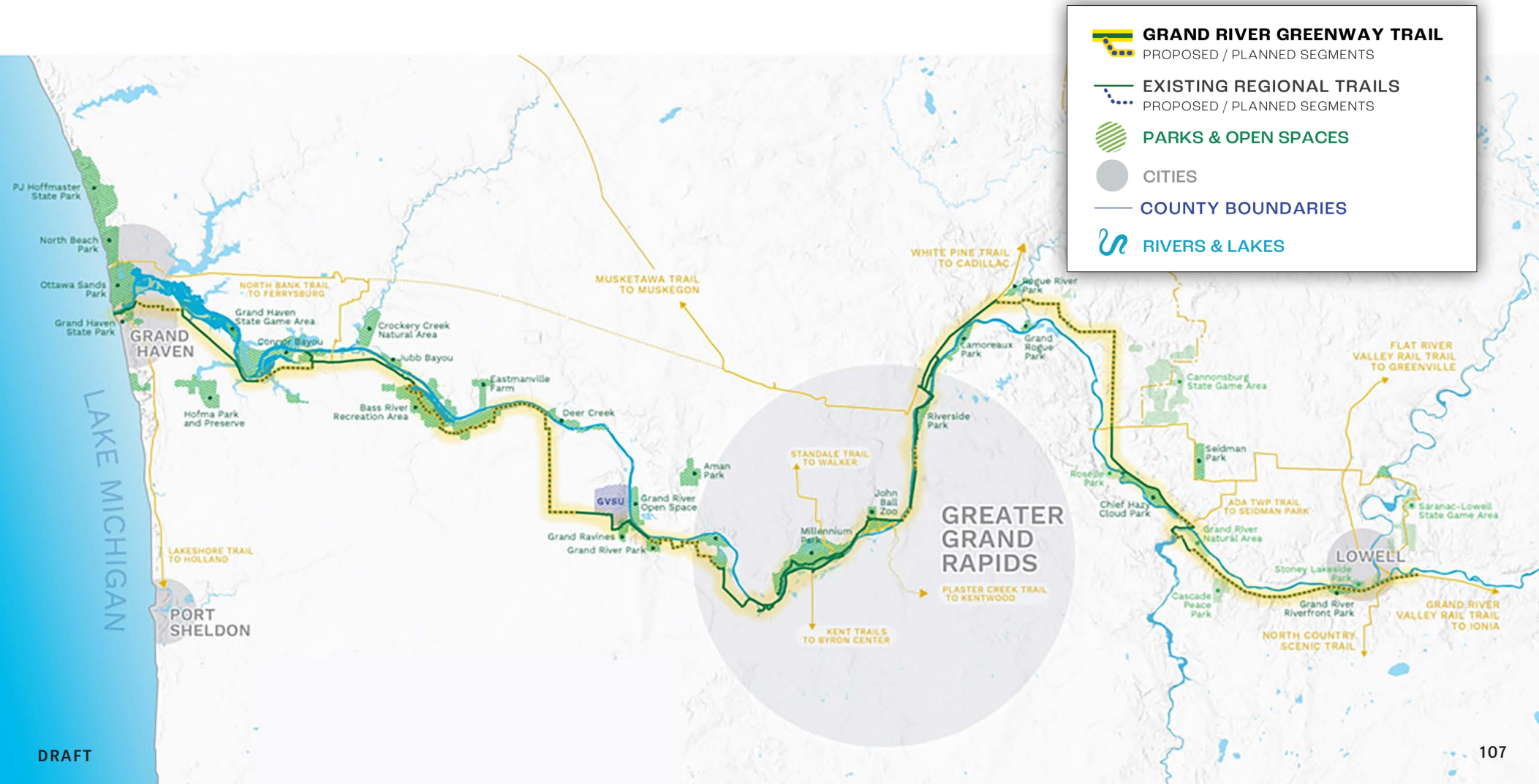
Political Context

- **City and County Leadership:** Both City of Grand Rapids and Kent County leadership have expressed a commitment to embedding public art into the region's growth trajectory. Their focus on a clear vision includes setting ambitious but achievable funding goals and fostering public-private partnerships to sustain long-term investment in public art.
- **City and County Staff:** Various municipal and County departments, including the Arts Advisory Committee, the Planning Department and the Parks Department, play key roles in implementing and maintaining public art initiatives. Their coordination is essential for aligning public art efforts with broader development and cultural goals.
- **Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. (DGRI):** As a key driver of public art and place-based investment, DGRI's flexibility and resource availability positions it as a central partner in implementing the public art plan. The organization manages the Downtown Development Authority (DDA), Monroe North Tax Increment Finance Authority and the Downtown Improvement District (DID), all of which contribute to funding and maintaining public art installations.

Physical Context

- Grand River Greenway:** The Grand River Greenway is an emerging network of public parks, multi-use trails and civic amenities designed to enhance the region's physical, social, environmental and economic health—particularly for communities lacking access to the river corridor. In Kent County, the Greenway follows the Grand River from Lowell on the eastern border to Millennium Park and Johnson Park on the west, spanning 50 miles of trails and 3,000 acres of public natural areas. The Greenway continues through Ottawa County, following the river's course to its confluence with Lake Michigan in Grand Haven.

- Environmental Considerations**
- River Health:** The Grand River is the subject of a number of ongoing restoration efforts to improve water quality, biodiversity and flood management within the river itself as well as along its banks and tributaries.
- Durability and Siting:** Seasonal conditions like flooding and erosion are critical in determining material selection and placement of artworks.



GRAND RIVER GREENWAY TRAIL
 PROPOSED / PLANNED SEGMENTS

EXISTING REGIONAL TRAILS
 PROPOSED / PLANNED SEGMENTS

PARKS & OPEN SPACES

CITIES

COUNTY BOUNDARIES

RIVERS & LAKES

Existing Infrastructure – Public Spaces and Artworks

- **Grand River Corridor Overview:** The corridor from Riverside to Millennium includes 14 parks spanning 1,750 acres (368 acres within City limits, excluding Millennium Park). It features 26 miles of river edge trail, with 82% of the acreage publicly-owned and 18% privately-owned. Infrastructure includes six existing street underpasses (six more planned), six existing bridges (one more planned) and two tunnels (one more planned).
- **Public Spaces:** The river corridor hosts 48 public art installations, but there is a need for more culturally-representative works. Existing parks and recreational areas present opportunities for integrating into new public art.
- **Accessibility of Public Art:** The accessibility of public art installations is shaped by surface conditions, lighting and wayfinding. Uneven trails, unpaved pathways and insufficient lighting can limit access, particularly for individuals with mobility challenges. Strategic improvements, such as enhanced lighting at key sites and smoother surfaces near installations, will ensure that public art is accessible and easily experienced by all visitors.
- **Public Art Maintenance and Conservation Considerations:** Key challenges include weathering, vandalism and long-term durability of installations. Surface conditions around artworks, such as erosion or damage to pathways, impact both accessibility and the visual integrity of the pieces. Additionally, consistent lighting maintenance is crucial to preserving nighttime visibility and safety. A proactive maintenance and conservation strategy will be essential to sustaining the impact and longevity of public art in the corridor.

Regional Cultural and Demographic Context

Grand Rapids serves as a vibrant cultural and economic hub within Michigan, distinguished by its diverse population and rich heritage. As of the 2020 Census, the City had a population of approximately 198,917 residents, making it the second-most populous City in the state, following Detroit.

Demographic Composition⁸

- Racial and Ethnic Diversity:
 - » White (Non-Hispanic): 57.5%
 - » Black or African American (Non-Hispanic): 17.4%
 - » Hispanic or Latino (of any race): 16.1%
 - » Asian (Non-Hispanic): 2.8%
 - » Two or More Races (Non-Hispanic): 5.0%
 - » Other Races: 0.4%
- Age Distribution:
 - » Median Age: 32.1 years
- Household Income:
 - » Median Household Income: \$70,258

Regional Perspective: Kent County

Expanding the scope to Kent County provides a broader understanding of the region's demographic and economic landscape. As of 2020, Kent County's population was 657,974, making it the fourth most populous County in Michigan and the largest outside the Detroit metropolitan area.⁹

Population Growth and Trends

Between 2010 and 2022, Kent County experienced consistent population growth, with an overall increase of 9.3%. The largest annual growth occurred between 2012 and 2013, at 1.4%.¹⁰ This upward trend reflects the County's appeal, driven by a robust economy and high quality of life.

The Grand Rapids-Wyoming Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), encompassing Kent County and surrounding areas, reached a population of 1,094,198 in 2022. This growth underscores the region's status as a significant population center in Michigan.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Summary of Engagement Process

The engagement process for the Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan was collaborative, accessible and transparent, with a focus on gathering a broad range of community input throughout each phase of the planning effort. The approach was guided by goals such as identifying barriers to participation, ensuring accessibility, leveraging local networks and fostering long-term civic engagement. A wide range of activities supported these goals, including site visits, advisory committee work sessions, focus group interviews, community events, online surveys and interactive tools like Maptionnaire. These tools collected both qualitative and geospatial feedback to inform the development of a comprehensive public art plan along the Grand River.

The process engaged a wide cross-section of the community, including Indigenous representatives, artists, property owners, City staff and officials, design professionals and members of the public who live, work or play near the Grand River. Engagement was structured across four phases, beginning with project initiation and moving through stakeholder engagement, visioning and plan development and final review. Success was measured through metrics focused on accessibility, reach and community feedback. Input gathered through these methods directly shaped the vision and recommendations included in the Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan.

1. Summary of Engagement with Grand Rapids Indigenous Community

This Indigenous stakeholder engagement summary is based on a series of one-on-one interviews conducted by Kimberly Van Driel, Director of Public Space Management at DGRI, with support from Paul Fragua of the MIG Native Nations Building Studio. These discussions provided a valuable opportunity to hear directly from Indigenous voices, ensuring the Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan accurately reflects the cultural heritage, values and priorities of the land's original stewards. The stories and insights shared offer a deep understanding of the spiritual, historical and contemporary connections Indigenous communities have with the Grand River, as well as their aspirations for the future. By gathering this information, DGRI honors and acknowledges the lived experiences and wisdom of those who have preserved these relationships for generations, while promoting a welcoming and respectful approach to public art that celebrates Indigenous presence, knowledge and artistic expression. It is our goal to create an intentional plan of action.

Approach and Methodology

- One-on-One Interviews and Community Engagement Events: Conversations were conducted with Indigenous community members, tribal leaders, artists, educators and students, using questions provided by Paul Fragua (MIG Native Nations Building Studio).
- Culturally Informed Engagement: The process prioritized respectful listening, relationship building and an emphasis on Indigenous knowledge systems, ensuring that community voices guide decision making.
- Thematic Exploration: Interviews focused on Indigenous connections to land and water, cultural representation, historical perspectives and the role of public art in honoring these traditions. Interviews also ascertained community wishes for other community connections and connectivity along the Grand River Greenway.

Summary of Findings

During these interviews and events, profound and challenging conversations took place to gather feedback from our local Indigenous community. Not only was it challenging to build trust and make connections for the interviewee, but it was challenging to build trust, share deep rooted trauma and experiences with someone they do not know. Key takeaways reveal that while non-Native people often look to Indigenous communities for their deep connections to water, nature and land and while these principles remain deeply ingrained in Indigenous identity, many of these traditions have been stripped away by centuries of colonization. As a result, numerous ceremonial practices, gatherings, traditions and connections have been lost, largely because of restricted access, the prohibition of cultural practices and the shame imposed through boarding schools. Members of the Indigenous community expressed hope in reviving these lost traditions to deepen their connection to the land—but emphasized the need for restored access and the removal of barriers to do so.

There are, however, recurring stories, themes and findings that the planning team wishes to share—not only to inform this plan, but also to guide future developments and community initiatives. Our goal is to uplift local Indigenous histories, stories and traditions that promote authentic Indigenous education within the broader community.

Key Themes:

• Sacred Relationship with Water and Land:

- » The Grand River is central to cultural identity, history and spirituality.
- » This land was deemed the Capital for Anishinaabek as a meeting place for traditional gatherings. Known as an area of trade and commerce.
- » For the Indigenous communities who lived along its banks, the river provided everything one needed—food, materials for lodging, clean water, ceremonial regalia and transportation. Everything was here not just for survival, but to lead a good life.
- » Water ceremonies, tobacco offerings, fishing, swimming, harvesting, connection, canoeing, food, recreation, healing, health and overall life are many of the ways in which these waters and relationships are sacred here for our First Peoples.

- » When one touches the Grand River, one is connected to the rest of the world as this river feeds into the Great Lakes that feed into the oceans.
- » Anishinaabek are Water Protectors.
- » Water is sacred, a life-giver and a teacher.
- » Importance of stewardship: taking only what is needed, minimizing impact and protecting the land. Traditional ecological knowledge emphasizes sustainable harvesting (wild rice, sweetgrass, medicinal plants).
- » Everything is interconnected: humans, water, animals and land. Everything is connected and inner connected. Humans are not at the center. Nothing is in the center. All those non-human agents, they are all telling their own stories to each other and across to each other. Our responsibility as humans is to learn how to listen and form a relationship and learn how to participate in that relationship.
- » This was a place where villages and people's livelihoods were deeply connected to the river. In the Downtown district alone, there were two villages on the west side of the river.

• Historical Representation

- » Grand Rapids and the Grand River is home to all Anishinaabek.
- » The Grand River area has long been a gathering place for trade, ceremonies and sustenance.
- » Native presence is often overlooked in history, leading to struggles for federal recognition and representation.
- » Need for Indigenous-led storytelling and accurate historical representation.
- » The concept of planning for “Seven Generations” guides decision-thinking about impact on future descendants.

- **Historical and Structural Challenges**

- » Ongoing struggle for federal recognition of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians.
- » Colonial impact has led to loss of access, cultural erosion and socioeconomic challenges and limited economic, social and political influence within Grand Rapids.
- » Concerns about environmental degradation and pollution affecting traditional practices.
- » Desire for transparency and ongoing dialogue between Indigenous communities and City planners.
- » Creating space for Indigenous voices in decision-making and commitment to genuine collaboration, not tokenism.
- » Accessibility concerns—ensuring access without excessive permits or restrictions.

- **Cultural Representation in Public Art**

- » Strong opposition to stereotypical imagery (e.g., tipis, dreamcatchers, headdresses, the “Hollywood” imagery of Indigenous people). Do not use any representation of owls as in many tribes, owls represent a death spirit. The Medicine Wheel is becoming quite controversial in certain tribes and should not be used unless local tribal councils are allowing it.
- » Art should be culturally respectful, created by Indigenous artists and integrated with nature.
- » Preference for Anishinaabek geometric patterns, floral motifs, wampum belts and clan symbols.
- » Desire for artworks that emphasize Indigenous resilience and contemporary identity.
- » Opportunities to share the history of Native community and traditions as well as stories: Stories of the seasons, creation story of Turtle Island, importance of the number seven, the four medicines, 7 Grandfathers,

Clan symbols and significance, Importance of Black Ash Trees, Legend of the Great Turtle, the Water Song, the story of Winter, significance of maple tree story to the 1836 Treaty, Water Panther (Mishipeshu), Moon Stories, Seven Fires Prophecy and the Three Fires Confederation.

- » Opportunities for community-led storytelling through art, signage and public events.
- » Art and public spaces should reflect Indigenous history, resilience and continued presence showcasing they are still here and contributing to society.
- » Native history is often overlooked or misrepresented; there is a need for accurate storytelling.
- » There are concerns about the lack of visibility and representation in public spaces.

- **Need for Gathering Spaces and Cultural Infrastructure**

- » Community members seek dedicated spaces for powwows, ceremonies and intertribal gatherings.
- » Sincere plea from almost every interviewee for the need for a cultural center or Indigenous designed gathering places along the river that is not specific to one tribe but all Indigenous community members to participate in gatherings and connectivity to uphold Indigenous traditions.
- » Lack of access to water for ceremonies, fishing and recreation due to urbanization and regulations.
- » Improved public transportation, bike paths and accessibility to key areas.

- **Educational and Interpretive Opportunities**

- » Strong support for interpretive panels, QR codes and walking tours highlighting Indigenous history.
- » Language revitalization—incorporating Anishinaabe words and dialects into public spaces.

- » Need for educational programming, guest speakers and storytelling initiatives.
- » Historical markers that educate citizens on the history of specific sites.

• **Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability**

- » Desire for public art to reflect Indigenous ecological knowledge and sustainability practices.
- » Support for habitat restoration projects that incorporate traditional land management methods.
- » Concerns over invasive species and habitat destruction affecting traditional practices. Need for reintroducing native plants and restoring natural ecosystems such as native plants, wild rice paddies and sacred spaces along the river.
- » Advocacy for policies that prioritize Indigenous land stewardship in urban planning.

• **Opportunities for the Public Art Plan**

- Authentic Indigenous Representation: Commission Indigenous artists for culturally accurate and meaningful works that honor local Native practices and histories.
- Language and Symbolism Integration: Incorporate Anishinaabe language and Three Fires Confederacy iconography into riverfront signage.
- Culturally Informed Spaces: Design gathering spaces that support storytelling, ceremony and community use.
- Restorative Environmental Design: Integrate Indigenous ecological knowledge into art and urban design.
- Collaborative Governance: Establish an Indigenous advisory board to oversee representation in public art initiatives and programming.
- Understanding that as our First People, we as a community should be reaching out to our Indigenous community first when collecting community input.

DGRI is committed to continue to meet with local Indigenous community members to further this dialogue and conversation. It is imperative that we continue dialogue around all these topics for further connection and progress advancement to truly create a River for All.

Miigwech - Thank You

We extend our sincere gratitude to all the Indigenous community members who generously shared their time, experiences and wisdom throughout this engagement process. Their thoughtful reflections on the significance of the Grand River, the deep cultural connections to land and water and the importance of authentic representation in public spaces have been invaluable and we look forward to continuing the conversation.

- Alan Compo
- Amy Westcott
- Andrea Riley Mukavetz
- Bead & Powwow Supply Native Community Event Attendees
- Camie Castaneda
- Ellie Mitchell
- Erica Woodford
- Grace Boda
- GVSU Mno'Chigewin Students
- Jamie Schackleton
- Jason Quigno
- Katrina Furman
- Lin Bardwell
- Ron Yob
- Two Eagles Marcus

Grace Boda in reference to the Grand River.

“I listen, as she holds
the history of our past.”

-Leadership Ways of the Three Fires Anishinaabek

2. Broader Community Engagement Summary

Survey Results and Public Input Data

Survey Overview:

Total Responses: 116

The survey aimed to understand community preferences for public art along the Grand River waterfront.

Key Insights from Open-Ended Responses:

The responses were categorized into major themes based on keywords and common topics.

- 1. Community Engagement:** Selections suggest a desire for art that brings people together.
- 2. Cultural and Historical Representation:** Community members express a strong interest in celebrating local history and culture through public art.
- 3. Environmental and Riverfront Connection:** Public art that reflects the natural environment and riverfront remains a clear priority.
- 4. Artistic Innovation and Variety:** There is strong interest in creative, interactive and experimental artworks across responses.
- 5. Wayfinding and Functional Art:** Participants highlight the value of public art that also serves functional purposes, such as signage, benches or bike racks. Summary of Return to the River Scavenger Hunt.

Summary of Return to the River Scavenger Hunt

Survey Overview:

Total Responses: 59

The “Discover the Secrets of Gitchi-zibi /Owashtinong: River Art Explorer Challenge” was a highlight of this year’s Return to the River event.

This family-friendly scavenger hunt guided participants along the Grand River with Explorer Maps to discover riverside art installations. Visitors completed creative challenges at each artwork, collected clues and strengthened their connection to both the art and river. The activity successfully engaged people of all ages, with many families completing the full journey.

Key Themes from Community Feedback:

- **More Art (7 responses)**

- » Community members strongly support increasing art installations
- » Continued promotion of local artists is highly valued
- » General sentiment that “more art is always better”

- **Community Impact and Event Continuation (5 responses)**

- » Strong support for maintaining the annual event format
- » Recognition of art’s role in “bringing community together”
- » Appreciation for the social connections fostered through public art

- **Specific Art Requests (3 responses)**

- » Interest in specific artists (e.g., “Have Christine Vermeer do a mural”)
- » Themed art suggestions (e.g., “more fish!!”)
- » Desire for targeted commissions

- **Art Maintenance and Visibility (3 responses)**

- » Importance of regular updates to existing artwork
- » Preference for more standing/vertical art visible from streets
- » Concern for ongoing care of installations

- **General Positive Feedback (3 responses)**

- » Appreciation for organizers' efforts
- » Overall satisfaction with the initiative

- **Artistic Details (1 response)**

- » Request for descriptions/plaques providing context about artwork

- **Creative Space Utilization (1 response)**

- » Suggestion to use the parking lot mural venue as an outdoor movie viewing space

Summary of World of Winter Pop-Up Poster Survey Results Key Insights on Public Art Themes

Respondents were asked what themes they would like to see reflected in public art along the Grand River. The most popular themes, based on first and second picks, include:

1. **Recreation and Community Engagement – 33 first picks, 20 second picks**
2. **Connection to Nature and Ecology – 16 first picks, 21 second picks**
3. **Indigenous Heritage and Cultural Legacy – 17 first picks, 11 second picks**
4. **Historical Significance – 12 first picks, 10 second picks**

Preferred Public Art Installations

Participants selected their preferred types of art installations for the riverfront:

1. **Play-Friendly and Interactive Artworks – 47 first picks, 28 second picks**
2. **Murals – 19 first picks, 13 second picks**

3. **Landmark Artworks – 14 first picks, 16 second picks**

4. **Gateway Works – 8 first picks, 18 second picks**

The strong preference for interactive art suggests a desire for public engagement and interactivity in the riverfront experience.

Preferred Public Art Locations

The most desired locations for public art installation were:

1. **New River Edge Trail, Fulton St. to Wealthy St. – 29 first picks, 21 second picks**
2. **New River Edge Trail, Leonard St. to Ann St. – 14 first picks, 16 second picks**
3. **Canal Park – 20 first picks, 12 second picks**
4. **Fish Ladder Park – 11 first picks, 19 second picks**

The **New River Edge Trail** appears to be a prime location for public art, with strong support across multiple segments.

Key Takeaways

- **Recreation and Community Engagement** is the most desired theme, indicating public interest in art that fosters social interaction and outdoor activity.
- **Play-Friendly and Interactive Artworks** are the top preference, reinforcing the community's interest in interactive and engaging art installations.
- **New River Edge Trail (Fulton St to Wealthy St and Leonard St to Ann St)** is the highest-priority area for public art placement.

Grand River Greenway Public Art Plan Steering Committee

Charles Burke, Frederick Meijer Gardens

Christopher Bruce-Karel, Grand Rapids Art Museum

Doug Matthews, City of Grand Rapids

Eddie Tadlock, ASM Global

Joel Zwart, Grand Valley State University

Josh Spencer, Kent County

Kayem Dunn, Downtown Development Authority, Grand River Network

Sean Foley, Independent artist

Steff Rosalez, Grandville Avenue Arts and Humanities, Grand River Network

Dr. Stephanie Ogren, Grand Rapids Public Museum

Stephen Smith, MUSE GR gallery

Two Eagle Marcus, Independent artist

Valerie Wahna, Independent artist

Interviews and Focus Groups

Aaron Bodbyl-Mast, Ottawa County, Interview

Alan Compo, Artist, Interview

Amy Wescott, GRPS Native American Education Program

Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, City of Grand Rapids Office of Equity and Inclusion, Interview

Andy Guy, Downtown Grand Rapids Inc., Interview

Arts and Culture Collective of Grand Rapids, Focus Group

Asante Cain, City of Grand Rapids, Arts Advisory Committee liaison, Interview

Bead and Powwow Supply, Indigenous Community, Focus Group

Belinda Bardwell, Grand Valley State University, Interview

Camie Castaneda, Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Pottowatomi, Interview

Catlin Whittington, ArtPrize, Interview

Charles Burke, Frederik Meijer Gardens, Interview

Cindy Foley, Grand Rapids Art Museum, Interview

City of Grand Rapids Planning Department, Focus Group

City of Grand Rapids Parks & Recreation Department, Focus Group

Doug Matthews, City of Grand Rapids, Assistant City Manager, Interview

Eddie Tadlock, Grand Rapids Arts Advisory Council Committee Member, Interview

Al Vanderberg, Kent County Administrator, Interview

Ellie Mitchell, Bead and Powwow Supply, Interview

Erica Woodford, Pinna Co., Interview

Frederick Meijer Garden, Tour

George Bayard III, Grand Rapids African American Museum and Archives, Interview

Grand Rapids Arts Advisory Council, Focus Group

GVSU Mno'Chigewin Students, Grand Valley State University, Focus Group

Grace Boda, Anishinaabe Circle, Interview

Ron Yob (Chief, Chairman, Oogema), Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians, Interview

Grand Rapids Art Museum, Tour

Grand Valley State University Pew Campus, Tour

Jamie Shackleton, Artist, Interview

Janet Korn, Experience GR, Interview

Jason Quigno, Artist, Interview

Kara Wood, Grand Action 2.0, Interview

Kate Meyer, LaFontsee Gallery, Interview

Katrina Furman, Grand Rapids Public Museum, Interview

Kayem Dunn, Downtown Development Authority, Grand River Network, interview

La Fontsee Gallery, Tour

Lisa Knight, City of Grand Rapids 2nd Ward Commissioner, Interview

Liz Sweet, Artist, Interview

Mark Washington, City of Grand Rapids, City Manager, Interview

Nathan Kemler, Grand Valley State University collections, Interview

Rosalynn Bliss, City of Grand Rapids, former Mayor, Interview

Sean Foley, Artist, Interview

Steff Rosalez, Grandville Ave. Arts and Humanities, Interview

Tiburcio Lincet, Grand Valley State University Office of Multi-Cultural Affairs, Interview

Trevor Bosworth, PLA, ASLA, Viridis Design Group, Interview

Two Eagles Marcus, Artist, Interview

Current Art Collection on the Grand River Greenway

NAME	ARTIST	YEAR	LOCATION	ADDRESS	TYPE	OWNERSHIP
Memorial Fire Bell	Meneely Bell Foundation	1888	North entrance of Grand Rapids Public Museum (GRPM)	272 Pearl St NW	Statue	Grand Rapids Public Museum
Fish Ladder Sculpture	Joseph Kinnebrew IV	1974	Fish Ladder area at the river	560 Front Ave NW	Sculpture	City of Grand Rapids
Kid Katwalk	Joseph Kinnebrew IV	1975	6th Street Park north of the gazebo	647 Monroe Ave NW	Sculpture	City of Grand Rapids
Lorrie's Button	Hy Zerkowitz	1976	North end of Ah-Nab-Awen Park	220 Front Ave NW	Sculpture	City of Grand Rapids
The River's Edge	James Clover	1989	Between GRPM and GVSU	104 Front Ave NW	Sculpture	Grand Valley State University
Nishnabe Gemaw Statue	Tom Hills	1992	North half of Ah-Nab-Awen south of the red button	220 Front Ave NW	Statue	City of Grand Rapids
Flying Geese	Marshall Fredericks	1994	On the East side of GRPM along the river	272 Pearl St NW	Sculpture	Grand Rapids Public Museum
River's Edge Environmental Sculpture	Michael Singer	1995	East end of the Blue Bridge	235 Fulton St W	Sculpture	City of Grand Rapids
Lucious Lyon	Stuart Williamson	2008	Lyon Square	296 Lyon St NW	Statue	Amway Hotel
The Spirit of Solidarity	Robert Chenlo	2007	Southwest end of Ah-Nab-Awen park along Pearl St NW	220 Front Ave NW	Statue	City of Grand Rapids
Steel Water/Fluoride Sculpture	Cyril Lixenberg	2007	South side of the JW Marriott Grand Rapids	235 Louis St NW	Sculpture	City of Grand Rapids
Be Still I Know IV	John Merigian	2009	Lacks Park	60 Front Ave NW	Sculpture	Grand Valley State University
Chief Noonday/Noahquageshik Statue	Antonio Tobias Mendez	2010	West side of the Grand River outside GBSU's Everhard Center, near the blue bridge	301 Fulton St W	Statue	Grand Valley State University
Grand River Fish Petroglyph	Kevin Sudeith	2014	Museum river edge	272 Pearl St NW	Sculpture	Grand Rapids Public Museum
Anna Sutherland Bissell	Ann Hirsch	2016	Grand River side of DeVos Place in plaza	303 Monroe Ave NW	Statue	Unknown
River For All	Lions and Rabbits	2017	All around downtown riverwalk	333 Bridge St NW	Mural	City of Grand Rapids

NAME	ARTIST	YEAR	LOCATION	ADDRESS	TYPE	OWNERSHIP
William Alden Smith	Robert Eccelston	2017	DeVos Place - Exit from the Grand Gallery towards the river	303 Monroe Ave NW	Statue	DeVos Place
Anishinaabek	Alan Compo	2018	Below the Pearl St Bridge	288 Pearl St NW	Mural	City of Grand Rapids
Monroe North Lot	Various Artists	2018	On the ground of the lot	555 Monroe Ave NW	Mural	City of Grand Rapids
Seen and Scene	Ellen Rutt	2018	West wall of Plaza Towers parking garage	201 Fulton St W	Mural	Private (Eenhoorn LLC)
Wallphabet	Dave Battjes	2020	Fish Ladder Park	624 Front Ave NW	Mural	City of Grand Rapids (DGRI maintains)
Bike and Skate Park Graffiti Murals	Various Artists	2020	All over the Skate Park	555 Monroe Ave NW	Mural	City of Grand Rapids (DGRI maintains)
Starlight	Valerie Wahna	2020	Lyon Square	--	Sculpture	Downtown Grand Rapids Inc.
Planted by the Sacred Streams of Grace	Brian Whitman	2021	Monroe Community Church	1020 Monroe Ave NW	Mural	Monroe Community Church
Manidoo Bawating	Hybycozo x Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians	2021	6th St Park	647 Monroe Ave NW	Sculpture	Downtown Grand Rapids Inc.
Unnamed rock sculptures	Jason Quigno	2021	Ah-Nab-Awen Park, in plum grove	220 Front Ave NW	Sculpture	City of Grand Rapids
We Belong	Derrick Hollowell and Artists Creating Together	2022	Canal Park	941 Monroe Ave NW	Mural	City of Grand Rapids
Joyful Formations	Rhiannan Sibbald	2023	North of 555 Lot	555 Monroe Ave NW	Mural	City of Grand Rapids (DGRI maintains)
Grand River Legacy Mural	Studiosmoov - Edwin Anderson	2023	Ah-Nab-Awen Park, underneath Gillett Bridge	220 Front Ave NW	Mural	City of Grand Rapids (DGRI maintains)
Michigan Fish Mural	Sotir Davidhi: Mural By Design	2023	6th Street Park boat launch	623 Monroe Ave NW	Mural	City of Grand Rapids
Life is But a Dream	Valerie Wahna	2023	DeVos Place riverfront promenade	245 Monroe Ave NW	Sculpture	Downtown Grand Rapids Inc.
Bird is the Word	George Eberhardt	2023	Underneath Michigan St Bridge - west side	--	Mural	City of Grand Rapids (DGRI maintains)
Just Keep Swimming	George Eberhardt	2024	East riverwalk, north of Post Office	647 Monroe Ave NW	Mural	City of Grand Rapids (DGRI maintains)
Sturgeon Sculpture	Craig Merchant	2024	East end of Blue Bridge	--	Temporary Sculpture	Downtown Grand Rapids Inc.
In the Water, In the Weeds	Dania Grevenoed	2024	West end of Blue Bridge	58 Front Ave NW	Mural	Downtown Grand Rapids Inc.

Benchmark Cities

In Michigan, several cities have developed a range of unique approaches to public art funding, maintenance, conservation and organizational structures, with some often opting for voluntary contributions and partnerships over mandatory “percent-for-art” ordinances. Others have percent-for-art requirements on City capital improvement budgets and one, the City of East Lansing, has a requirement applicable to private real estate development. Here's an overview of the strategies employed by East Lansing, Detroit, Ann Arbor, Marquette and Jackson.

East Lansing

- **Percent-for-Art Ordinance:** East Lansing is the only Michigan City with a percent-for-art ordinance that includes requirements for private developers. Adopted in 2014, Ordinance 1339 requires private real estate development projects with budgets over \$500,000 to allocate 1% of the project budget for public art, up to a maximum of \$25,000 per project. Developers have the option of installing the artwork on site or contributing some or all of their required investment to the City's Public Art Fund, which is managed by the East Lansing Arts Commission. The ordinance also applies to City-funded capital improvement projects that meet the budget threshold, with those funds going into the Public Art Fund.
- **Maintenance and Conservation for Public Art:** The City collaborates with artists and donors to establish maintenance and conservation plans, ensuring that each piece of art receives appropriate care throughout its lifespan.
- **Organizational Structure:** The East Lansing Arts Commission advises the City Council on matters related to public art, facilitating community engagement and the integration of art into the City's cultural landscape.

- **Collection:** East Lansing has more than two dozen artworks in its collection, plus at least eight works created through the private development requirement. The City also maintains a public art gallery in a community center that exhibits work from new and emerging artists on monthly basis.

Detroit

- **Percent-for-Art Ordinance:** In 1977, the City of Detroit adopted a mandatory percent-for-art ordinance on City capital improvement projects. City public art funds are complemented by philanthropic efforts and private sector partnerships.
- **Detroit Riverfront Conservancy:** The Conservancy has a public art program for artworks within their geographic area. Art is funded by contributed income, via an annual fundraiser and sponsorships.
- **Maintenance and Conservation for Public Art:** Maintenance of the City's collection is managed by the City. Likewise, the Conservancy maintains its own artworks from its operating budget.
- **Organizational Structure:** Oversight for the City's public art program is provided by the Detroit Arts Commission, managed by City staff. The program currently focuses on its City Walls program, a mural program highlighting local artists and heritage. The Conservancy formerly had a Public Art Committee and dedicated staff position. Its current public art program is staff-driven and emphasizes murals, public space activations and other artworks. Murals are all commissioned as temporary, allowing for future removal.

- **Collection:** The City's public art collection is extensive and broadly distributed. The City Walls program has generated more than 125 murals almost all created by Detroit artists and is part of the City's intention to become America's top street art City. The Riverfront Conservancy's public art collection includes murals and street art, plus other site-specific installations and a collaboration with the Detroit Institute of Art's (DIA) Inside/Out project, which brings reproductions of masterpieces from the DIA's collection to outdoor locations.

Ann Arbor

- **Percent-for-Art Ordinance:** In 2013, Ann Arbor replaced its mandatory "percent-for-art" ordinance with a more flexible model. The City now funds public art on a case-by-case basis, utilizing grants, donations and discretionary funds instead of allocating a fixed percentage from capital improvement budgets.
- **Funding for Public Art:** Public art projects are financed through a combination of grants, private donations and City funds allocated as needed, allowing for adaptability based on project requirements and available resources.
- **Maintenance and Conservation for Public Art:** Maintenance and conservation responsibilities are managed by the City, with funding sourced from the same flexible pools that finance the art projects, ensuring the longevity and upkeep of installations.
- **Organizational Structure:** The Ann Arbor Public Art Commission oversees the selection, installation, maintenance and conservation of public art, working closely with City officials and community stakeholders to integrate art into public spaces.
- **Collection:** Ann Arbor now has a diverse collection throughout the City, including a major water sculpture at City Hall, metal tree sculptures by a local artist in West Park and PowerArt!, which are artist-designed wraps for downtown utility boxes.

Marquette

- **Percent-for-Art Ordinance:** Marquette does not have a mandatory "percent-for-art" ordinance. Instead, the City has established a Public Art Policy that includes the creation of a Public Art Fund to support art in public spaces.
- **Funding for Public Art:** The Public Art Fund is a separate, special revenue fund into which public art funding is deposited. The City has committed to an annual contribution of \$30,000 from the general fund to support public art initiatives.
- **Maintenance and Conservation for Public Art:** Funds from the Public Art Fund may be used for the cleaning, repair and restoration of public art, ensuring the longevity and upkeep of installations.
- **Organizational Structure:** The Marquette Public Art Commission (MPAC), a seven-member volunteer body, is responsible for developing guidelines and administering the Public Art Policy, overseeing all phases of City-owned public art projects.
- **Collection:** The City has several notable installations, including the ongoing Cultural Trail Project, an Indigenous sculpture by local Grand Rapids artist Jason Quigno, other sculptures and artworks created on bike paths and the surface of a sports court

Jackson

- **Percent-for-Art Ordinance:** Jackson does not have a mandatory "percent-for-art" ordinance. The City supports public art through voluntary contributions and community partnerships.
- **Funding for Public Art:** Funding is sourced from grants, private donations and collaborations with local businesses and organizations, enabling a diverse range of public art projects.

- **Maintenance and Conservation for Public Art:** Maintenance and conservation responsibilities are shared between the City and the commissioning bodies, with plans established to ensure the proper care of artworks.
- **Organizational Structure:** The Jackson Public Arts Commission advises the City Council on public art matters, facilitating the integration of art into public spaces and promoting community engagement.
- **Collection:** Jackson's voluntary approach to public art yielded community-initiated responses, most notably the Bright Walls Mural Festival produced by the Jackson Young Professionals from 2018-2022. There is also a privately funded Falling Waters Sculpture Trail with 14 artworks.

These cities exemplify the wide variety of approaches to supporting public art in Michigan, often relying on community engagement, partnerships and flexible funding models to enrich their public spaces with artistic endeavors.

Note that Michigan cities, unlike municipalities in many other states, have been reluctant to adopt public art requirements for private real estate development, in part because of concerns raised by the Home Rule Act and its takings doctrine. However, it is arguable that, if a private art requirement is desired, an ordinance could be structured to satisfy the Home Rule Act.

Benchmarking Leading Public Art Master Plans

To inform a bold and effective vision for Grand Rapids, we examined cities with exemplary Public Art Master Plans that have successfully transformed their public spaces, strengthened community identity, and driven cultural and economic impact. These cities demonstrate how strategic investment in public art—when aligned with community values, urban development, and creative expression—can leave a lasting legacy.

Seattle, WA

Why: One of the pioneers with its “1% for Art” program since 1973, Seattle's Public Art Master Plan integrates art across all City infrastructure and neighborhoods. **Impact:** Over 400 permanent artworks Citywide, fostering civic pride, neighborhood identity and a national reputation for innovative, integrated public art.

Minneapolis, MN

Why: The Minneapolis Public Art Policy focuses on equity, community storytelling and place-based art, with clear guidelines for artist selection and maintenance. **Impact:** Strengthened neighborhood identities and increased public participation in the arts, while supporting diverse artists and embedding cultural narratives in public spaces.

Austin, TX

Why: Austin's Art in Public Places (AIPP) program integrates art into City projects, with a master plan focusing on innovation, community engagement, and cultural diversity. **Impact:** Supports Austin's reputation as a creative City, increases local artist opportunities and activates public spaces in line with the City's “Keep Austin Weird” ethos.

Miami-Dade County, FL

Why: The County-wide Art in Public Places program focuses on integrating art into public infrastructure with a strong curatorial vision. **Impact:** Elevated Miami's international art profile (alongside Art Basel), transformed transit hubs and civic buildings and contributed to economic growth through cultural tourism.

Policies and Procedure

Artist and Art Selection Criteria

Artists and artworks represent the heart of the Grand River Public Art Program and their work contributes great value to the community. Artists' public artworks enrich the Grand River Corridor artistically and aesthetically. They support quality of life of residents and enhance the visitor experience, furthering the community's reputation and identity as an arts community and stimulating community dialogue. One element of that respect is to provide clear guidance and transparent procedures for artists' interactions with the program. All artists' rights will be acknowledged and included in artists' agreements.

The Grand River Public Art Program is committed to a transparent and artist-centered selection and procurement process. By upholding high artistic standards, supporting a wide variety of artists and integrating art intentionally into the river corridor, the program ensures that public art will enrich the community, reflect its history and inspire future generations.

Artist Selection Process

Selecting an artist whose experience, artistic style, commitment to collaboration and community facilitation skills match the needs of the project is critical to the success of any project. Specifically, the goals of the selection process are to:

- Select an artist or artists whose existing public artworks or past collaborative efforts have maintained a high level of quality and integrity.
- Identify an optimal approach to public art that is suitable to the demands of a particular project.
- Select an artist or artists who will best respond to the distinctive

characteristics of the site and the community it serves.

- Select an artist or artists who can work successfully as members of an overall project design team.
- Ensure that the selection process represents and considers the interests of all parties concerned, including the public and the arts community.

The selection process includes:

1. Review and selection of the artist by the Grand River Artworks Committee or an Artist Selection Panel.
2. If an Artist Selection Panel is used, it would recommend the selected artist to the Grand River Artworks Committee and to DGRI.

Artist Selection Panels provide additional community involvement beyond the Grand River Artworks Committee for select projects. These ad-hoc panels operate for a limited time and are charged by the Grand River Artworks Committee with artist selection. Each panel includes:

- An acting Grand River Artwork Committee member serving as Chair.
- 1-2 community members from the installation site area.
- A liaison from any business or corporation involved with the site (when applicable).
- A professional artist.

The following criteria should be referenced and applied throughout all selection processes.

- **Qualifications:** Artists shall be selected based on their qualifications as demonstrated by past work and the appropriateness of their concepts to the project. Of highest priority are the artistic capabilities of the artist and the inherent quality of their artwork.
- **Artistic Excellence:** Artists and the public art shall demonstrate excellence of creative and aesthetic ideas, a mastery of skills and techniques, communication of unique vision or perspective and professional approaches to process and presentation.
- **Media and Styles:** All forms of public art shall be considered, subject to any requirements set forth by the project proposal. Artists whose artworks are representative of all schools, styles and tastes shall be considered, as appropriate to the specific characteristics of the project and the site.
- **Appropriateness to Site:** Artwork shall be appropriate in scale, material, form and content for the selected site. The art must have an artistically compelling relationship to the physical character or significance of the site and the surrounding geographic context. It shall also have or reasonably accommodate any necessary supporting infrastructure and follow applicable code requirements.
- **Durability:** Durability shall be defined in relation to the intended lifespan of the project. For both short-term and long-term installations consideration shall be given to structural and surface integrity, permanence and protection of the proposed artwork against theft, vandalism, weathering, excessive maintenance, repair costs and extreme weather events such as floods, tornadoes or fires.
- **Visual Accessibility:** The proposed artwork will be readily visible to the public and meet the location requirements of the project.
- **Public Liability:** Safety conditions or factors that may bear on public liability should be considered in selecting an artist or artwork. Examples of safety concerns may include a work that invites children to climb on it, has sharp edges or is at risk of damage from extreme weather.

- **Variety:** The Program shall strive for a variety of style, scale, media and artists. The program shall also strive for a balanced distribution of artworks throughout the Grand River Corridor.
- **Maintenance:** The proposed artwork will not require extraordinary maintenance. The maintenance plan should address vandalism, weathering, natural disasters and the timeframe of the artwork.

Eligible Artworks

In general, all forms of artistic expression created by professional artists, in a wide variety of styles, media and genres, are eligible for participation in the Program. Examples may include free-standing works, murals or works that have been integrated into underlying architecture or landscape. Artworks may include performance, participatory, functional and/or interactive elements.

Ineligible Artworks

Public art projects are not intended to substitute for functional elements that would normally be a part of private development or capital projects. Unless they are specifically designed by professional artists, the following will not be considered as part of the Program:

- Directional elements such as supergraphics, signage or color coding except where these elements are integral parts of an overall design created by a professional visual artist.
- Art objects which are mass produced or of standard manufacture, such as playground equipment, fountains or statuary elements, unless incorporated into an artwork by a project artist.
- Reproductions, by mechanical or other means, of original works of art, except in the cases of film, video, photography, printmaking or other media arts.
- Decorative ornamental, architectural or functional elements that are existing and designed by the building architect, as opposed to elements created by an artist commissioned for that purpose.

- Landscape architecture and gardening except where these elements are designed by a professional visual artist and/or are an integral part of the artwork by the artist.
- Service or utilities necessary to operate and maintain an artwork.
- Political/religious/sexual (as defined by City of Grand Rapids Art Ordinance).

Site Selection Criteria

Consideration of the importance of each of the following site criteria for public art projects is important to site selection. Along with the site selection criteria in the plan, the following should be considered:

- The visibility of the site by the public.
- Public accessibility to the artwork.
- Public safety of the site, especially when considering interactive public art.
- Pedestrian traffic patterns and vehicular traffic patterns.
- Surrounding design including landscaping, lighting and seating considerations.
- Relationship to nearby existing artworks and the surrounding environment.
- Environmental considerations such as flooding, salt, light, etc.
- Impact on any adjacent property owner's vistas, views or other impact.
- Cost of installation and maintenance as related to the site.
- The probability of vandalism or theft.

Artists' Call and Selection Processes

Program staff, in partnership with the Grand River Artworks Committee, shall determine the selection method for individual projects. Any of the following methods may be used, depending upon the requirements of the project. Stipends are provided to the artists for public art proposals.

- **Open Competition (RFQ/RFP):** An open competition is a call to artists for a specific project in which artists are asked to submit evidence of their past work. Any artist may submit qualifications and proposals. Calls for entries for open competitions will be sufficiently detailed to permit artists to determine whether their work is appropriate to the project under consideration.

A two-part selection process is recommended:

- **Step 1:** Request for Qualifications (RFQ). Artists are invited to submit a resume, work samples and a letter of intent outlining their interest in the project and their approach to the project. The Selection Panel will choose a small group of artists to move to the proposal phase.
- **Step 2: Request for Proposals (RFP).** The selected group of artists are invited to submit proposals. The artists are given specific details and guidelines about the project to develop a conceptual proposal. The artists are paid a stipend for their time to develop the concepts for the project.

Limited or Invitational Competition: Staff invite a limited number of artists to submit credentials and/or proposals for a specific project. Invitations shall be based on evaluation of an artist's past work and demonstrated abilities to successfully respond to the conditions posed by the project (i.e., water features, light works, paintings, sound works, landscape works, design team efforts, etc.) or on other non-aesthetic Program goals (e.g., artists who reside in a particular community or neighborhood where a project is occurring, local artists or regional artists). The artists are paid a stipend for their time to develop the concepts for the project.

Direct Selection: Staff/consultant may choose a direct selection in which they contract with a specific artist for a commission or to purchase an existing work. This approach is rarely used and will generally occur when circumstances surrounding the project render an open or invitational competition unfeasible (e.g., project timeline, community or aesthetic considerations). The artist is paid a stipend for their time to develop the concepts for the project.

Artist Rights

DGRI, artists and other entities involved in a commissioned artwork are subject to the Federal Visual Arts Rights Act, which specifies and protects the rights of artists in their artwork within certain limits. It is an essential aspect of the commissioning process and, while artists are allowed to and often do waive certain rights granted under the Act, these issues must be addressed in the specific artist agreement for the project. This section provides general commitments and provisions for such agreements and may be modified as needed for specific projects, within the limits of the Act.

The commissioning entity is committed to fostering a climate in which artists thrive and receive both economic benefits and recognition for their work. For this reason, it is important that artists retain reasonable control over the integrity of their artworks and receive equitable compensation for their creative endeavors.

DGRI seeks to uphold the following rights for artists, which shall be incorporated into artist contracts for the commissioning or purchase of works of art.

Recognizing that successful public art is generally inseparable from the site for which it is created, DGRI shall use its best efforts to ensure that its departments or site agencies do not move or remove an artwork unless its site has been destroyed, the use of the space has changed or compelling circumstances require its relocation. Any such actions should be reviewed by DGRI before being undertaken. Should it become necessary to remove an artwork, DGRI shall make reasonable efforts to consult with the artist or, if the artist is deceased, their designated representative, estate, or legal heir to ensure that the removal respects the artist's original intent and complies with any applicable rights or agreements. However, DGRI reserves the right to move or remove the artwork without prior notification in emergency situations where an immediate threat to property or public safety is present. In all instances, DGRI will act in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Visual Artists Rights Act.

Recognizing the importance of preserving the integrity of an artwork, DGRI shall seek to ensure that its departments or site agencies do not intentionally alter, modify or destroy an artwork. However, if an artwork is significantly altered, modified or destroyed—whether intentionally or unintentionally—the artist shall have the right to disclaim authorship. Should an artist choose to exercise this disclaimer, DGRI shall, upon request, formally ask the department or agency to remove any plaques, labels or other identifying materials associating the work with the artist.

The integrity of each artwork depends on regular, professional maintenance. DGRI is committed to periodic inspections and will make reasonable efforts to ensure all conservation and repairs follow the artist's original maintenance guidelines and adhere to the highest professional standards. When feasible, DGRI will notify and consult the artist before any restoration is undertaken during their lifetime, offering them the opportunity to perform the work for a reasonable fee. In cases of emergency, DGRI reserves the right to proceed with necessary repairs without prior notice.

The artist retains all copyrights associated with works of art accessioned by DGRI, including those acquired for DGRI. DGRI agrees that it will not copy or reproduce the artwork in any way, nor give permission to third parties to do so, without prior written permission from the artist. Notwithstanding this policy, DGRI have the irrevocable right to create photographs display, distribute, or otherwise use photo or other two-dimensional representations of the artwork for public, noncommercial purposes. Such as catalogues, marketing materials, brochures and guides.

Ownership and Management of Artworks

Ownership of each artwork will generally be tied to the site or property owner, whether public or private. In practice, Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. (DGRI) may serve as the management entity for artworks, including those located on public property, ensuring consistent oversight, maintenance coordination, and long-term stewardship across the corridor. Clear agreements will be established for each installation to define ownership, responsibilities, and maintenance protocols.

Maintenance and Conservation Policies

DGRI will oversee the overall maintenance and conservation of public art implemented as a result of this plan to ensure effective oversight of public art. DGRI will be responsible for assuring maintenance and conservation needs are assigned, planned and funded, even though it will not always be responsible for maintenance/conservation tasks. The documentation of public art and maintenance plans should be easily transferable to any entity that assumes any program responsibilities. A recommended approach is outlined below.

1. Online Public Art Management System:

- Contract with a public art online platform to document all public art installations (artist, materials, records, etc).
- The system can issue automated reminders for report submissions and flag artwork requiring immediate attention.

2. Maintenance and Conservation Contract:

- Contract with a reputable conservation organization to conduct annual audits and perform any maintenance and conservation needs.

3. Annual Maintenance Audits:

- Schedule annual audits of all public artworks on their respective properties.
- These audits can include site inspections, condition assessments and documentation of each piece's current state.

4. Property Owner and Partner Reporting:

- Property owners and partners hosting public art projects can assist with monitoring the installations. Work with them to submit semi-annual maintenance reports to DGRI. These reports can include:
 - Photographs of the artwork.
 - Notes on observed wear, damage or environmental impacts.
 - Details of any maintenance activities performed during the reporting period.

5. Emergency Reporting Protocol:

- Establish a clear protocol for property owners and the public to report urgent issues (e.g., vandalism, structural instability) directly to the City and County.
- Include response time benchmarks to ensure quick action.
- Develop a plan for critical incidents (weather, climate change impacts, etc).

Deaccessioning Artworks

DGRI is responsible for maintaining the quality and integrity of the public art collection. While regrettable, it is occasionally necessary to remove an artwork from the collection if it no longer meets standards for quality or safety or if there is an immediate threat due to weather or a natural disaster. The commissioning entity is responsible for the review and approval of deaccessioning decisions. All deaccessioning shall be subject to the artist's rights under their agreement with the commissioning entity and the federal Visual Artists Rights Act.

Criteria for Deaccessioning

A work of art may be deaccessioned for one or more of the following reasons:

- In the judgment of staff, the artwork no longer meets the aesthetic or artistic standards of the collection.
- The artwork is not or is rarely, on display due to the lack of a suitable site.
- The condition or security of the artwork cannot be reasonably guaranteed.
- The artwork is damaged and repair is infeasible or the cost of repair is disproportionate to the artwork's value.
- The artwork requires excessive maintenance due to faults in its design.
- The artwork endangers public safety.
- The artwork must be removed immediately due to an impending weather event or natural disaster.

- The site of a site-specific artwork has been so severely altered that the artwork is no longer compatible or relevant.
- The property on which a site-specific artwork is located is no longer owned by the responsible party.
- The property must undergo necessary infrastructure improvements.
- The artwork is significantly incompatible with or inferior to the rest of the collection.
- The commissioning entity wishes to replace the artwork with a work of greater significance by the same artist.
- There has been sustained and overwhelming public objection to the artwork over a prolonged period.
- The artwork has been stolen or destroyed.
- If the contract or commissioning entity specifies it is a temporary artwork.

Donations and Long-Term Loans of Artwork

Works of art proposed for donation or long-term loan (six months or longer) to the DGRI program shall be carefully reviewed according to established criteria designed to meet the following objectives:

- To provide uniform procedures for reviewing and accepting gifts or loans of artworks.
- To vest responsibility for managing and ensuring the long-term care of donated artworks within a single agency.
- To facilitate planning for the placement of artworks along the Grand River Corridor.
- To maintain high artistic standards for all artworks.
- To provide appropriate recognition for donors.

At any time, DGRI may impose a temporary moratorium on donations and loans. All artworks proposed for donation or long-term loan shall be subject to the same timeframe requirements as all other artworks.

Memorials are ineligible as proposed donations or loans of artwork. Proposed memorials are subject to specific policies (see Memorials section).

Review Criteria for Artwork Donations or Loans

DGRI shall evaluate proposed donations or loans and base its decision to accept or deny them on the following criteria:

Aesthetic Considerations

To ensure artworks of the highest quality, proposed gifts or long-term loans should be accompanied by:

- A detailed written proposal.
- Concept drawings and/or photographs of the artwork.
- Documentation of the artist's professional qualifications.
- If necessary, a certified appraisal of the artwork's value.
- A Maintenance and Conservation Plan.

DGRI shall assess both the aesthetic quality of the artwork and the artist's qualifications to determine whether the donation or loan should be accepted. DGRI may refuse a proposed donation or loan on aesthetic grounds.

Site Context

If the donor proposes a site for the donated or loaned artwork, the artwork must be compatible in scale, material, form and content with its intended location. Consideration shall be given to:

- The social and environmental context of the site.
- The artwork's interaction with or contribution to the space.
- Structural and surface soundness.
- Potential risks such as theft, vandalism, weather damage and excessive maintenance costs.

Financial Considerations

- Funding for the project, including the estimated cost of maintenance and repair over the artwork's lifespan.
- If the proposed donation or loan is accepted, a legal agreement shall be executed between DGRI and the donor.
- Acceptance is contingent upon the donor covering all associated costs, including transportation, installation and maintenance.

Liability

- The artwork's susceptibility to damage or vandalism.
- Any potential risks to public safety.
- Special insurance requirements.

Maintenance and Conservation

- DGRI shall require donors to provide an endowment for the long-term maintenance and conservation of the donated or loaned artwork.
- Exceptions may be made if alternative funding sources exist or if there is a compelling reason for DGRI to assume financial responsibility.

Uniqueness of Art

- DGRI will only accept unique, one-of-a-kind works of art.
- Prints, photographs or limited-edition works by a renowned artist may be considered if they meet high artistic standards.

Proposal Requirements

All proposed artwork donations and loan requests shall be reviewed by DGRI staff. Proposals must include:

- Slides, photographs or a model of the proposed artwork.
- A biography of the artist.
- The cost of the artwork and the anticipated budget for installation.
- Information on donor recognition.

- Maintenance requirements for the artwork.

Artworks proposed for long-term loan (one year or more) shall be subject to the same considerations outlined above.

Memorials

This policy applies to requests for permission to place monuments, memorials, markers or plaques honoring organizations or events on Grand River Corridor property.

Eligibility:

At any time, DGRI may impose a temporary moratorium on memorials.

DGRI staff shall evaluate proposed memorials, markers or plaques based on the donation criteria above, as well as the following:

Use of Public Space

- Consideration of the primary uses of public space is a priority.
- While appropriate memorials may enrich an area, preserving open space is paramount.
- Memorial proposals will be carefully reviewed within this context.

Timelessness

- The memorial must represent values and principles that remain relevant to future generations.
- The significance of the organization or event being memorialized shall be carefully considered.

Community Significance

- Proposed memorials must commemorate a historically significant event organization, institution or person(s).
- Memorials should appeal to broader community interests.

Location

- The proposed location must be appropriate for the memorial.
- Specific geographic justification should be included in the application.

Indemnification

Notwithstanding any other provision in this document, nothing herein shall be construed as a waiver of DGRI's affirmative defenses or governmental immunity. DGRI expressly retains all legal protections and defenses available to it under applicable law.

Further, each artist, contractor, or any other party involved in the installation, maintenance, or removal of public art under the Program (collectively referred to as "Indemnifying Parties") shall indemnify, defend, and hold harmless DGRI, its officers, directors, employees, agents, and affiliates (collectively referred to as "Indemnified Parties") from and against any and all claims, damages, liabilities, losses, costs, and expenses (including reasonable attorneys' fees) arising out of or related to the public art installations. This includes, but is not limited to, claims for personal injury, property damage, and public safety issues, except to the extent such claims arise from the gross negligence or willful misconduct of the Indemnified Parties.

NOTWITHSTANDING ANY OTHER PROVISION HEREIN AND TO THE EXTENT LAWFUL, ALL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ARTIST AND DGRI RELATED TO THE PROGRAM SHALL BE MEMORIALIZED IN A FORMAL, NON-NEGOTIABLE, WRITTEN AGREEMENT, WHICH SHALL BE EXECUTED BY BOTH PARTIES PRIOR TO ANY PAYMENT IS RECEIVED.



Operational Workflow and Decision-Making Process

The Grand River Public Art Program follows a comprehensive workflow designed to ensure effective funding, site selection, implementation and long-term sustainability of public art projects. This process emphasizes collaboration, transparency and community engagement, aligning with the program's strategic goals and fostering a thriving cultural corridor along the Grand River.

Workflow Overview

1. Funding and Sustainability

Funding is the first step, ensuring that resources are secured before moving forward with project planning and implementation.

- Secures funding through the Public Art Fund, pooling contributions from foundations, corporations, individual donors, grants and developers.
- DGRI ensures financial oversight and transparent fund management, allocating resources for new artworks, maintenance and conservation.

2. Site Planning and Project Proposal

- Sites are identified and prioritized based on visibility, accessibility, environmental conditions and community input.
- The Grand River Artworks Committee reviews potential sites and provides recommendations for aligning with public art goals.
- DGRI issues RFQs/RFPs tailored to site-specific needs and community priorities.

3. Project Procurement and Artist Selection

- The Public Art Program Manager oversees procurement and coordination for the artist selection process.
- The Grand River Artworks Committee and/or Artist Selection Panel, with input from DGRI, reviews artist submissions and selects artists based on:
 - Qualifications and artistic excellence.
 - Alignment with site characteristics and public art goals.
 - Selected artists are contracted to execute their proposed projects.

4. Implementation and Permitting

- Oversees project execution, coordinating fabrication, installation and stakeholder collaboration.
- DGRI ensures compliance with City regulations and permitting requirements, working closely with artists and relevant agencies to streamline the process.

5. Maintenance and Conservation Planning

- DGRI leads ongoing maintenance efforts in partnership with the Maintenance Vendor and Conservation Expert.
- Maintenance plans are integrated into every project, ensuring the longevity and quality of public artworks.

6. Public Engagement and Programming

- The Program Manager spearheads public outreach and programming, fostering community involvement and appreciation of public art.
- Engagement activities include forums, educational events, interactive installations and tours, enhancing community connection to the riverfront.

7. Strategic Review and Adjustments

- The Grand River Artworks Committee evaluates program progress annually, incorporating lessons learned and stakeholder feedback into updated strategies.
- Continuous improvement ensures the program remains relevant, impactful and aligned with evolving community goals.



Public Art ToolKit

Introduction

This toolkit is designed to support the successful planning, commissioning, installation and stewardship of public art along the Grand River in Grand Rapids. Drawing on best practices recommended by Americans for the Arts and other industry standards, it outlines the key components needed for a range of public art project documents. These outlines are intended to serve as starting points and checklists when drafting formal agreements, plans and reports.

Disclaimer: These materials provide general guidance only and do not include completed templates or finalized legal documents. Users should consult with legal, financial and project management professionals to ensure accuracy, compliance and appropriateness for their specific projects.

1. RFQ Guidelines (Sample)

Purpose: To outline the standardized process and expectations for issuing a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to artists.

Key Components (with suggested inclusions):

- Outreach Strategy.
- Project Description and Goals (including site renderings with approximate dimensions and a narrative summary of the project intent, surrounding context and community priorities).
- Eligibility Requirements.
- Submission Requirements (CV, Statement of Interest, Work Samples and at least three professional references — no concept proposals required).

- Evaluation Criteria.
- Selection Process and Timeline.
- Budget Range (if applicable).
- Contact Information for Questions.

2. Open Call to Artists Process (Sample)

Purpose: To ensure an open and accessible artist selection process that invites a broad range of applicants.

Key Components (drawing from RFQ best practices):

- Project Overview and Goals (including site renderings with dimensions and background on community context and priorities).
- Target Audiences (local, regional, emerging artists etc.).
- Submission Requirements (images, artist bio and at least three professional references—no concept proposals required).
- Review Process and Selection Panel Composition.
- Outreach Strategy.
- Timeline and Notification Process.
- Budget Range (if applicable).
- Contact Information for Questions.

3. Concept Development Agreement (Sample)

Purpose: Outlines scope and expectations during concept development phase.

Key Components:

- Artist Name and Contact
- Project Name and Location
- Deliverables (concept sketches, models, presentations)
- Timeline
- Payment Schedule for Concept Phase
- Intellectual Property and Copyright
- Termination Clause

2. Artist Commission Contract (Sample)

Purpose: Legally binding agreement for commission of artwork.

Key Components:

- Approved Concept as an Exhibit
- Artist Information
- Scope of Work
- Deliverables
- Budget and Payment Schedule
- Timeline and Milestones
- Insurance and Liability
- Rights and Ownership
- Installation Responsibilities
- Termination and Dispute Resolution

3. Maintenance and Conservation Plan Template (Sample)

Purpose: To ensure the long-term care of public art installations.

Template Sections:

- Inspector Name
- Artwork Description
- Materials Used
- Installation Date
- Maintenance Schedule
- Special Conservation Requirements
- Environmental Concerns
- Responsible Party for Maintenance
- Recommendations
- Artwork Description
- Materials Used
- Installation Date
- Maintenance Schedule
- Special Conservation Requirements
- Environmental Concerns
- Responsible Party for Maintenance

4. Annual Maintenance Report (Sample)

Purpose: Annual record of inspections and maintenance.

Sections:

- Artwork Title and Location
- Artist
- Inspection Date
- Findings/Condition Assessment
- Maintenance Completed
- Recommendations
- Photos

5. Project Budget Worksheet (Sample)

Purpose: Tracks all project costs from planning to installation.

Categories:

- Artist Fees
- Materials
- Fabrication
- Engineering/Consultants
- Transportation
- Installation
- Insurance
- Contingency
- Admin/Overhead
- Maintenance and Conservation (20% of total project budget)

6. Artist Budget Worksheet (Sample)

Purpose: Helps artists submit detailed and realistic budgets.

Categories:

- Insurance (required)
- Permits (if required)
- Artist Design Fee
- Fabrication Labor
- Studio Overhead
- Equipment Rental
- Materials
- Shipping and Travel
- Installation Labor
- Documentation

7. Art Installation Logistics Planning Sheet (Sample)

Purpose: Planning document for on-site installation.

Sections:

- Installation Date
- Artwork Components
- Equipment Needed
- Required Certifications to Operate Equipment
- Site Access and Restrictions
- Safety and Risk Assessment
- Contacts (Artist, Project Manager, City Staff)
- Weather Plan

8. Final Inspection Report Template (Sample)

Purpose: Sign-off report upon completion of installation.

Checklist:

- Date of Inspection
- Artwork Completeness
- Structural Integrity
- ADA Compliance
- Safety
- Site Cleanup
- Notes
- Letter of Acceptance
- Register Copyright
- Title Transfer
- Signatures (Artist, Project Manager, City Representative)

9. Public Art Performance Dashboard (Sample)

Purpose: Tool to monitor the impact and success of the public art program.

Metrics:

- Number of Artworks Installed
- Artist Demographics (Local, National, Race/ethnicity, Disability, Emerging)
- Budget Allocation
- Maintenance Schedule Compliance
- Public Engagement Activities
- Community Satisfaction (Survey Results)

Glossary of Terms

Here is a Glossary of Public Art Terms as defined by Americans for the Arts and commonly used in the field of public art:

General Public Art Terms

Accessioning: The process of adding and recording an artwork into the Public Art Collection, whether by commissioning, purchase or donation.

Acquisition: The inclusion of an artwork in the Public Art Collection by commission, gift or loan.

Art, Work(s) of Art or Art Works: Tangible or experiential creations that result from the intentional application of skill, imagination and aesthetic principles. These works encompass a broad spectrum of mediums and forms, including but not limited to visual, sculptural, digital, performative, environmental and conceptual expressions, often designed to evoke meaning, emotion or reflection.

Artist: A person who practices any of the creative arts and who creates a body of artwork.

Deaccessioning: The process of permanently removing an artwork from the Public Art Collection, whether by sale, destruction and/or removal from public display.

Public Art: Artwork created for public spaces and accessible to all, often commissioned by governments, private developers or arts organizations.

Percent-for-Art: A policy requiring a percentage of a public or private development project's budget to be allocated for public art.

Placemaking: The process of creating vibrant public spaces that integrate cultural, social and economic factors to enhance community engagement.

Creative Placemaking: A strategy that uses arts and culture to shape the physical, social and economic character of a place.

Temporary Public Art: Artworks installed for a limited duration, often as part of festivals, exhibitions or experimental projects.

Public Art Types and Mediums

Sculpture: A three-dimensional artwork that can be freestanding, relief, kinetic or site-integrated.

Mural: A large-scale painting or artwork directly applied to walls or ceilings.

Integrated Art: Art that is embedded into the architecture, landscape or infrastructure of a site.

Kinetic Art: Art that incorporates movement, either mechanically or through environmental forces like wind.

Environmental Art: Art that addresses ecological concerns or integrates with the natural landscape.

New Media Art: Art that incorporates digital technology, including projections, interactive installations or augmented reality.

Street Art: Uncommissioned, public-facing art, often using graffiti techniques or wheat-paste posters.

Public Art Planning and Process

Call for Artists (CFA): An open request inviting artists to submit qualifications or proposals for a public art project.

Request for Qualifications (RFQ): A selection process where artists submit their experience and past work, rather than a specific proposal.

Request for Proposals (RFP): A call inviting artists to submit a conceptual or detailed proposal for a specific public art opportunity.

Selection Panel: A group of stakeholders, including artists, community members and arts professionals, responsible for choosing artists for projects.

Public Art Master Plan: A strategic document that guides the selection, placement and curation of public artworks in a City or region.

Artist-in-Residence: A program placing an artist within a community organization or government to create site-specific work over a designated period.

Funding and Management

Commission: A contractual agreement for an artist to create a specific public artwork.

Maintenance and Conservation: Strategies and actions taken to preserve and care for public art over time.

Deaccessioning: The formal process of removing an artwork from a public collection, often due to damage, safety issues or site changes.

Public-Private Partnership (PPP): A collaboration between government agencies and private organizations to fund and develop public art.

Community Engagement and Impact

Civic Engagement: Active participation of residents in the planning, creation or discussion of public art.

Cultural Representation: Ensuring that public art represents a wide variety of voices, histories and communities.

Social Practice Art: Art that focuses on social engagement, participation and community dialogue rather than traditional aesthetic outcomes.

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6, *Nishnabe Gemaw* | Tom Hills

6, *Anishinaabek* | Alan Compo

6, *Motu Viget* | Mark Di Suvero

7, Fig. 1 | *Performing artist* | Molly

7, Fig. 2 | *Fish Ladder* | Joseph Kinnebrew

7, Fig. 3 | *SHROOMS* | Amigo & Amigo

9, *Anishinaabek* | Alan Compo

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10, Fig. 5 | *Just Keep Swimming* | George Eberhardt

10, Fig. 6 | *La Grande Vitesse* | Alexander Calder

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11, Fig. 2 | *Performing artist* | Professor Bird

12, *Stargaze* | Valerie Wahna

14, *River's Edge Environmental Sculpture* | Michael Singer

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28, *David* | The Underground Circus

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34, *Life is But a Dream* | Valerie Wahna

38, *Be Still and Know* | John Merigian

39, *Alarum* | Two Eagles Marcus

41, *Sturgeon* | Craig Merchant

43, *La Grande Vitesse* | Alexander Calder

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