

CITY OF LA CROSSE ARTS BOARD

PLAN for an ART PARK: **Nii HOSTÓ***

Concept approved by Arts Board and Park Board in 2020

*Phonetic pronunciation: Neenh ho STO'

BACKGROUND and VISION

Nii Hostó (“water comes together” in Ho Chunk) exists between the proposed River Point development and the Black, La Crosse, and Mississippi River. **Nii Hostó** can serve to connect La Crosse’s downtown and the new River Point development with a natural, safe, well-lit and creative art corridor. The Arts Board is working with other council committees and with the City Council to realize this important part of its mission: “analyze gaps and opportunities in programming, support, funding, and promotion for the arts, cultural activity and economic development.” Notable gaps include the city’s lack of a sculpture park, nonexistent public art by Native Americans, and no native place names. Further, while the city boasts a wealth of public art in designated places such as parks and other city-owned venues (one example is the *Confluence* mural on the west façade of the Pump House), no space exists for contemporary, experimental art or a place where art and nature can share a stage. In large part, our culture (nationally and locally) demonstrates a predilection for permanent monuments and sculpture. Contemporary art, spanning at least the last five decades, has sought a different concept of art in public places, often embracing a temporal, ephemeral nature, in the form of earthworks and site-specific sculpture, and artwork that evolves with the culture. Another notable gap is the absence of inclusivity in cultural activity, specifically (Ho-Chunk) place names of public lands within the city. This wetland landscape and the entire river valley exists on Ho-Chunk Land. With an expressed intention to honor native peoples, specifically the Ho-Chunk people who maintain a presence in the area, the board received a name from the Ho-Chunk Tribal Elder Court that describes the space: **Nii Hostó (water comes together)**.

WHAT IS AN ART PARK?

Art exists at the center of who we are and where we are going. Art is for everyone, especially when situated in a public park devoted to celebrating creativity and culture. An art park is similar to a sculpture park, in that it is an outdoor park or garden space dedicated to the arts and nature: pieces might involve light-based artwork, or temporary, ephemeral sculpture, as well as more permanent, enduring works. **Nii Hostó** is conceived as an **art park** because it will not only feature sculptures/installations, but could also serve as a space for creating art outdoors in the form of temporary outdoor exhibitions, ceremonies and performances, or open-air drawing and painting. A gateway artwork will create a dynamic entry point, signifying this new passageway and place to linger and explore. **Nii Hostó** will also serve as an outdoor classroom both for the artwork it features in addition to a newly restored indigenous landscape. It is also the site for a new Ho-Chunk listening tour.

GATEWAY SCULPTURE and inaugural ARTWORKS

In anticipation of the establishment of **Nii Hostó**, the Arts Board identified the opportunity for a gateway-type artwork to signify the new space. The board approved a sculpture called “The Arch of Nature.” This artwork was designed by Roald Gundersen, whose inspiration came from the Losey Memorial Arch at the entrance to Oak Grove Cemetery, based on the triumphal arch of antiquity. “The Arch of Nature” celebrates the triumph of nature’s ability to survive by changing, acknowledging the ephemerality of our existence. Functioning as gateway feature, the artwork offers a transition from our urban world into the wetland habitat, a passage between downtown and the new River Point development. The Arts Board will fund other inaugural artworks through an RFP process, seeking grants and sponsorship for this endeavor. Some artworks will be ephemeral in nature, while others will remain on site for a longer period of time. All artwork placement will comply with all permits and site requirements.

FEATURES and AMENITIES

The Arts Board, Park Board and Park Department are working in concert to create a safe, attractive and exciting art park. We seek to create both continuity and variety within the art

park with regard to lighting pathways and artworks, indigenous landscape, and artist-designed seating and signage. Together with the artworks situated throughout **Nii Hostó**, pathways and seating offer views of downtown, the pond and rivers.

OBSERVATIONS, PRECEDENTS and SOURCES

Nii Hostó is a space that will accommodate innovative, contemporary sculpture/installation by regional and national artists. The area that will become **Nii Hostó** currently exists as an extension of the network of recreational trails in the city center, as it connects with the La Crosse River Marsh Trails, the International Friendship Gardens and Riverside Park. We have identified similar initiatives for sculpture parks, including the following (3 of which are on public/city-owned land):

Franconia Sculpture Park (founded 1996) <https://www.franconia.org/>

Michigan Legacy Art Park (founded in 1995) <https://michlegacyartpark.org/>

Stevens Point Sculpture Park (founded in 2009) <http://stevenspointsculpturepark.org/>,

Socrates Sculpture Park (Queens, NY; founded in 1986) <http://socratessculpturepark.org/>.

The Greenway (Boston; founded in 2008) <https://www.rosekennedygreenway.org/art/>

These venues feature some temporal sculpture installations, which is part of our vision for **Nii Hostó**. Further, there is strong potential for utilizing the space as an outdoor creative laboratory by area schools, such as Summit Environmental School, the School of Technology and the Arts I & II, area higher education institutions. The Arts Board envisions this space as an intersection of art, nature, and culture. We are especially interested in engaging the Ho Chunk Nation in developing site-specific sculpture for **Nii Hostó** to connect with the Ho Chunk listening tour. In proximity to the proposed mixed-use development of River Point, the art park could inspire a segue to more public art in park and commercial spaces within the development.

“Using Art to Define Our Parks” (article by Paula Jacoby-Garrett featured in Parks & Recreation magazine, September 2015) <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2015/september/using-art-to-define-our-parks/>

TIMELINE

February-May 2021	Work with Darius Allen-Lanai Bottorff, UW-Madison Landscape Architecture student, with recommendations from his BLA capstone project that includes Nii Hostó and the River Point development
March 2021	Approve Nii Hostó plan, Park Dept. selects landscape architect/engineer for site plan Arts Board planning for inaugural sculptures and funding, draft RFP for additional ephemeral works
June 2021	Publish RFP for ephemeral artworks
August 2021	Completion of site plan Ephemeral artworks deadline
October-November 2021	Install “Arch of Nature” and additional ephemeral artwork(s)
January 2022	Arts board publishes RFPs for ephemeral and enduring artworks
May 2022	Install new ephemeral artwork(s)
July 2022	Install first enduring artwork(s) Nii Hostó art park DEDICATION