

City of La Crosse Arts Board

Abstract for a SCULPTURE WALK/CORRIDOR: **RIVER POINT SCULPTURE PARK**

September 2018 (draft revised January 2020)

CITY of LA CROSSE ARTS BOARD MISSION

The purpose of the Arts Board is to focus on four principal areas: Development of the Arts District as identified in City Vision 2020; to serve as forum to receive proposals and forward them to appropriate Council committee; work as advocate for the arts by commenting of policies and plans of the City and by seeking non-City funding for its advancement; and to analyze gaps and opportunities in programming, support, funding, and promotion for the arts, cultural activity and economic development.

BACKGROUND and VISION

As part of its mission, the Arts Board seeks to “analyze gaps and opportunities in programming, support, funding, and promotion for the arts, cultural activity and economic development.” One notable gap is in the area of contemporary public art, specifically, contemporary sculpture. While the city boasts a wealth of public art in designated places such as city parks (featuring sculpture by local artists), and other city-owned venues (such as the *Confluence* mural on the west façade of the Pump House), no space exists for contemporary, experimental art in the medium of sculpture. 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 sculpture in public places, embracing instead a temporal, ephemeral nature, in the form of earthworks and site-specific sculpture. The newly restored, yet still “wild” space of River Point presents a unique location and opportunity to realize this vision. From our formative conversations on how this space might be utilized, at least two significant sculptural proposals have been brought before the board.

OBSERVATIONS and PRECEDENTS

What we envision is a space that will accommodate innovative, contemporary sculpture/installation by regional and national artists. River Point 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 Stevens Point Sculpture Park (founded in 2009) <http://stevenspointsculpturepark.org/>, Franconia Sculpture Park <https://www.franconia.org/>, and in Queens, New York: Socrates Sculpture Park (founded in 1986) <http://socratessculpturepark.org/>.

The venues feature temporal sculpture installations, which is our vision for the River Point space. 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 River Point, and in commissioning a sculpture that creates a gateway to this special, unique space. In proximity to the proposed mixed-use development of River Point, the sculpture park could inspire a segue to more public art in park and commercial spaces to the north of the trail.

INAUGURAL SCULPTURE

The Arts Board recently approved an inaugural sculpture for placement at the easternmost edge of River Point. "The Arch of Nature" is a new sculpture for a newly envisioned space in River Point. The sculpture, designed by Roald Gundersen, is inspired by the Losey Memorial Arch at the entrance to Oak Grove Cemetery, which is based on the triumphal arch of antiquity. "Triumphal," is defined as celebrating a triumph, or showing a feeling of triumph. "The Arch of Nature" celebrates no military victory or singular, monumental achievement. And unlike the permanence of other triumphal gateway arches, "The Arch of Nature" instead celebrates the triumph of nature's ability to survive by changing, acknowledging the ephemerality of our existence. It serves as a gateway from our urban world into the wetland habitat, a passage between downtown and the new River Point development. An initiative of the City Arts Board, "The Arch of Nature" is the inaugural sculpture for a space that may soon become home to more artworks.