Art Commission Application Form

You must submit the following along with this form as a single PDF.

- Individual or organizational statement (250 word max)
- Letter of intent that includes history of project and its impact on the community (500 word max)
- Visual materials (See Art Commission Guidelines for requirement)
- Budget describing cost of materials, artist fees, maintenance, installation, etc.
- Two letters of support from project partners or neighborhood organizations
- One letter of support from the Department of Public Works or Department of Mobility & Infrastructure

Notes:

- You may be required to hold a Development Activities Meeting with the applicable Registered Community Organization prior to Hearing. For more information, visit pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/roco.
- After receiving Art Commission approval, any necessary permits, certificates of occupancy, legal agreements, or other city approvals are still required. These must be applied for separately at the appropriate City departments and are the responsibility of the applicant.
- Application format is a digital copy of full application form, required documents, and the presentation to be projected at the Hearing as one single PDF. Send all documents to pacd@pittsburghpa.gov.

Project Information

Type of Project: 
- [ ] Conceptual Review
- [X] Conceptual/Final Review
- [ ] Final Review
- [ ] Courtesy Review

Has this project been come before Art Commission before?
- [X] No
- [ ] Yes, when: ________________

Duration of project: From _____/____/_____ to _____/____/_____ 20+ years

Permanent? 
- [ ] No
- [X] Yes
Project Location

Address: Reservoir Drive, Highland Park

Cross Streets or other relevant information: Located within Highland Park

Neighborhood: Highland Park

Applicant Information

Name: Andrea Ketzel

Mailing Address: 414 Grant Street, Room 301

City: Pittsburgh State: PA Zip: 15219
Phone: 412-255-8852 Email: andrea.ketzel@pittsburghpa.gov

Relationship or Role in Project: Senior Project Landscape Architect

Co-Applicant (optional)

Name: 

Mailing Address: 

City: State: Zip: 
Phone: Email: 

Relationship or Role in Project:

Presenter at Hearing if different than applicant: Nina Chase, Principal, Merritt Chase
Organizational Statement

City of Pittsburgh Department of Public Works

The mission of the Department of Public Works is to operate and maintain infrastructure while providing essential services for everyday life, regional economic growth and environmental sustainability.

Letter of Intent

The Highland Park Super Playground is located in the East End of Pittsburgh and serves the surrounding Highland Park, Morningside, Larimer and Stanton Heights neighborhoods. The renovation of the playground presents a unique opportunity to support the community vision of an iconic and community-centered, accessible public playground. The renovation project includes the replacement of all play structures, play surfacing, and the addition of new site improvements including site furniture, entrance, trees, planting and public art.

The existing Highland Park Super Playground was built through a robust community-led process in 1991. Over 90 volunteers worked with playground designer Robert Leathers to design and construct the playground through a design-build process. During its 30-year lifespan, the playground has been maintained by the City of Pittsburgh and the Highland Park Community Council (HPCC). For the last 15 years, the HPCC has managed a community-fundraised maintenance fund which has helped to cover costs related to the upkeep and repair of the playground. In recent years, the HPCC’s Parks & Playground Committee has worked with City of Pittsburgh staff towards the goal of renovating the playground.

In the Spring of 2020, the City of Pittsburgh’s Project Team, led by Andrea Ketzel, hired Merritt Chase as landscape architects to facilitate the design, engagement, and renovation of the Super Playground. Merritt Chase’s sub-consultant team includes Civil & Environmental Consultants for surveying and engineering, Kanics Inclusive Design Services for accessible playground design, and Bartlett Tree Services for existing tree assessment.

The Highland Park Super Playground renovation project began in August of 2020 and foregrounded community input throughout the process. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, social distancing guidelines were required throughout the process. The City of Pittsburgh utilized online engagement tools through the EngagePGH website and Highland Park Super Playground project page. Digital materials were posted as they were developed. All public workshops were recorded and posted to the website. The design process included public workshops, multiple online surveys, youth activities, and site visits. Engagement has resulted in a final design project that reflects the Highland Park community, honors the history of the playground, and meets the contemporary visions and demands of a 21st century playground.

Three public workshops were hosted in October 2020, December 2020, and March 2021 to align with key project milestones. The public workshops included large group presentations to share design updates and feedback, small group conversations in breakout rooms, interactive visioning with virtual
pin-up space and playground equipment selection exercises. Public workshops were scheduled in the early evenings to promote attendance from families and kids in particular. In addition to attending virtual workshops, kids provided ideas and feedback by participating in an activity worksheet that could be printed at home, sketched on, and sent back via email.

Based on initial feedback, five design principals were defined for the project.

1. Construct an inclusive, accessible, contemporary playground for all ages and abilities.
2. Design an iconic, memorable playground.
3. Utilize natural, sustainable materials and methods.
4. Provide imaginative play equipment.
5. Accentuate the unique site and its context.

Design feedback from the surveys, workshops, and activity worksheets was incorporated into the final design of the playground. Community input included strong preference for the use of wood for play equipment, the integration of small amounts of color in the playground equipment and surfacing, use of natural elements such as wood logs and boulders throughout the site, maintenance of the existing Super Playground castle theme, incorporation of a water theme, introduction of more trees in the playground, addition of ADA accessible play equipment, and relocation of the playground entrance for increased safety. Additionally, the integration of public art was an important feature.

The final design of the Highland Park Super Playground renovation includes a selection of wood play structures from Kompan’s Robinia nature play playground equipment line. Play equipment is appropriate for a range of ages, as required by the state of Pennsylvania. ADA accessible play equipment is incorporated throughout the playground and exceeds the state requirements. Themes of land and water are incorporated into the project referencing the original castle theme of the Super Playground and Highland Park’s history as home to two of the City’s reservoirs. Rubber bonded mulch and engineered wood mulch are utilized as surfacing. Site improvements around the playground include a relocated entrance with access to the existing Maple Grove Shelter. Native perennial plantings and a wooden fence enclose the playground on two sides. Site amenities include new litter receptacles, bike racks, stroller parking, and drinking fountain.

Although this project is not paid for by City capital funds, the budget for the Super Playground renovation includes an amount for public art that would exceed 1% of the project budget. Multiple opportunities for public art were discussed and examined throughout the design process. The final design incorporates three specific public art initiatives: 1) New benches and site furniture, constructed by Urban Tree, using reclaimed wood from Highland Park and the surrounding neighborhoods, 2) small “hidden” animal mosaics embedded into the new benches and site furniture, and 3) community garden mosaic installed along the native perennial garden between Reservoir Drive and the Super Playground.

The two mosaic art projects are being led by the Highland Park Community Council (HPCC) as a hands-on community involvement component for families and to add an additional layer of art to the playground. The HPCC is partnering with the local, non-profit Pittsburgh Glass Center (PGC) to plan and execute these mosaics. PGC has done a wide-variety of public art projects like this and is well-prepared to support community involvement in the creation of the mosaics. The animal mosaics build on “hidden” animal mosaics installed throughout the Pittsburgh Zoo in Highland Park.
HIGHLAND PARK SUPER PLAYGROUND
PROJECT SCOPE

- Reservoir Drive
  - Improve access
  - Refresh structure

- Tree
  - Remove and replace

- Wooden play structure
  - Replace and redesign

- Swings
  - Replace and relocate

- Fountains
  - Replace drinking fountain

- slopes
  - Grade

- Edging
  - Replace

- Porta-potty + bike rack
  - Relocate

- Reservoir Drive Walk
  - Improve entry
What about the existing playground would you like to see in the new super playground?

“Wooden play area with other natural materials. Different play modules in clusters. The ability for children to run from one area to the next. Wobbly areas. The kids love them! Areas to go over and under as well as climb. Swings!”

“The Castle is amazing for my family. We love being able to connect the entire playground and explore.”

EngagePGH Survey

Youth Activity Worksheet
CUSTOM SMALL CASTLE
CUSTOM LARGE CASTLE
ROPE COURSE
SPINNER
LARGE SHIP
SHARK SPRINGER
DOLPHIN SPRINGER
VILLAGE
1-BAY SWINGS
3 BAY SWINGS
MAPLE GROVE SHELTER
RESERVOIR DRIVE
MEMORIAL TRAIL
HIGHLAND PARK SUPER PLAYGROUND
FINAL DESIGN
HIGHLAND PARK SUPER PLAYGROUND
FINAL DESIGN | NON-STANDARD SITE FURNITURE

- Reclaimed wood + boulder scramble
- Reclaimed wood tables
- Litter receptacles
- Reclaimed wood benches
- Reclaimed wood steppers
- Drinking fountain + litter receptacles
- Maple Grove Shelter
- Bike racks
- Wood fence
- Reservoir Drive
- Memorial trail
Bartlett Tree Assessment

- Tree ID: 4
  Size: 36” cal.
  Common Name: Northern Red Oak
  Recommendation: **Remove**
  Structural risk with branch &/or root stem

- Tree ID: 11
  Size: 36” cal.
  Common Name: Swamp White Oak
  Recommendation: **Remove**
  Poor condition
HIGHLAND PARK SUPER PLAYGROUND
FINAL DESIGN | NON-STANDARD SITE FURNITURE + PUBLIC ART | URBAN TREE
Existing playground fence

Proposed playground fence

LEGEND
1. 2" x 4" Wood Top Rail
2. 1" x 4" Wood Picket, Flattop
3. 2" x 4" Bottom Rail
4. Fenced Grade
5. 4" x 4" Wood Post with flattop, 2" min.

Wood fence | Typical Section
Scale 1/2" = 1'-0"

LEGEND
1. 2" x 4" Wood Top Rail
2. 1" x 4" Wood Picket, Flattop
3. 2" x 4" Bottom Rail
4. Fenced Grade
5. 4" x 4" Wood Post with flattop, 2" min.

Wood fence | Typical Elevation
Scale 1/2" = 1'-0"
HIGHLAND PARK SUPER PLAYGROUND
FINAL DESIGN | PUBLIC ART | HIGHLAND PARK COMMUNITY COUNCIL MOSAICS

"Hidden" Mosaics
Inspired by similar mosaics at the Pittsburgh Zoo, and the idea of hidden elements like the tiny figures throughout The Playground at Riverfront Park in Aspinwall, these 10 hidden mosaics will be small pieces, assembled by local glass artists that will be embedded into the actual playground. These pieces will be tucked onto the reclaimed wood and natural stone pieces that are being incorporated as nature-play and seating areas within the new playground footprint.

The goal is for the pieces to feel like a surprise scavenger hunt for children to discover as they play and explore the area.

Reference Images:

Example small mosaics made by Pittsburgh Glass Center artists

Mosaics embedded at the Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium
HIGHLAND PARK SUPER PLAYGROUND
FINAL DESIGN

- Entrance
- Swings
- Dolphin springers
- Shark springer
- Large ship
- Small ship
- Village
- Swings
- Reclaimed wood + boulder scramble
- Reclaimed wood bench
- Reclaimed wood bench + table
- Native planting
- Large castle
- Small castle
- Maple Grove Shelter
- Primary entrance
- Ropes course
HIGHLAND PARK SUPER PLAYGROUND
FINAL DESIGN | RECLAIMED WOOD AND BOULDER SCRAMBLE
# Highland Park Super Playground

## Budget

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Note: Project funded by RAD
Andrew Moss, Vice-Chair
City of Pittsburgh Art Commission
200 Ross Street
Fourth Floor
Pittsburgh, PA

May 3, 2021

RE: Highland Park Super Playground Renovation Project | Letter of Support

Dear Vice-Chair and Pittsburgh Art Commission Members:

The Highland Park Community Council (HPCC) writes this letter to express support for the Super Playground Renovation Project. The HPCC, in operation since 1945, is the oldest continually operating neighborhood organization in the City of Pittsburgh. The HPCC’s mission is “to take a leading role in the community activities that address issues of common interest and concern and that promote a safe and healthy neighborhood for the diverse residents of Highland Park.”

The Highland Park Super Playground was built in 1991 through dedicated community efforts. The HPCC and its members were involved in this unique community process, which brought together over 90 volunteers to establish the Super Playground. Throughout the playground’s 30 year history, the HPCC has continued to be involved in its maintenance and care, with the past 15 years in particular under the stewardship of Monica Watt, who previously served as the HPCC President. This includes the management of a community-fundraised Maintenance Fund which has helped to cover upkeep and repairs at the playground over the past three decades.

The playground’s original planned lifespan was 20 years. As this lifespan was reached and then passed, HPCC leadership has worked with the City towards the goal of renovating the playground for the next generation. In 2020, this renovation became a reality as the City dedicated funding for the playground renovation. The HPCC Parks & Playground Committee has been working closely with Andrea Ketzel, Senior Landscape Architect for the City of Pittsburgh and the project’s leader, and Merritt Chase, the design firm working with the City to design the new playground.

Our primary role has been three-fold: 1) To provide direct design feedback to the City and Merritt Chase to ensure that the renovated playground lives up to and exceeds the scale, quality, and imagination of the original playground; 2) To help facilitate community engagement with the general public in the design process by assisting in the planning and promotion of community workshops, surveys, and other engagement channels; 3) To represent the desires of the community that come out of that engagement.

We have been very pleased with the City’s dedication to public engagement during this process, which has included 3 public workshops and 3 public surveys, as well as ongoing updates about the project posted through the City’s Engage platform. In our collaboration with Ms. Ketzel and the team at Merritt Chase, we have seen that the community’s suggestions and concerns have been taken seriously and incorporated into the design.
Their general commitment to honor the original design direction of the playground has been steadfast, particularly the community’s desire for the renovation to retain the natural wood element of the original playground and completely cover and extend the current playground’s footprint. The updated design maintains the iconic castle elements of the existing playground, while adding additional imaginative play elements including a large ship play structure, more swings, and an area designed for younger playground guests. They have also worked to integrate community desires for other improvements, including better integration with landscape around the playground including trees and slopes, and increased accessibility features. We support the new, bonded, playground surface they’ve planned, which will improve cleanliness and safety over the current mulch-based groundcover. We are also pleased that the dedication to natural materials has been extended to the benches and tables for the new playground, as well as new additional nature-play elements, in collaboration with Urban Tree.

Overall, the HPCC supports the Highland Park Super Playground Renovation Project, the community process that the project has followed, and the final design direction of the renovation.

Best regards,

**Sabrina Culyba**  
Parks & Playground Committee Chair  
Highland Park Community Council

**Monica Watt**  
Parks & Playground Committee Member  
Highland Park Community Council

**Betsy Rogerson**  
Parks & Playground Committee Member  
Highland Park Community Council

**Mac Lynch**  
Parks & Playground Committee Member  
Highland Park Community Council

cc:

**Andrea Ketzel**  
Senior Landscape Architect  
City of Pittsburgh
Mosaics at the Super Playground

About the Highland Park Community Council

The HPCC, in operation since 1945, is the oldest continually operating neighborhood organization in the City of Pittsburgh. The HPCC’s mission is “to take a leading role in the community activities that address issues of common interest and concern and that promote a safe and healthy neighborhood for the diverse residents of Highland Park.”

About the Pittsburgh Glass Center

Established in 2001, Pittsburgh Glass Center (PGC) is a nonprofit, public-access education center; an art gallery; a state-of-the-art glass studio; a community builder; and a hub for innovation and creativity. PGC is the largest arts organization on Penn Avenue and has been vital to the redevelopment of the city’s rapidly growing East End.

Project Background:

The Super Playground in Highland Park is scheduled to be renovated in fall of 2021. The original playground, built 30 years ago, was a true community effort, with community volunteers providing everything from funding to the actual construction labor. That hands-on effort created a real connection / ownership of the playground for many families in the neighborhood. For the current playground renovation, community members have had numerous opportunities for design input through surveys and 3 interactive workshops over the past eight months but will not be involved in the construction this time.

The Mosaics at the Super Playground art project is being led by the Highland Park Community Council (HPCC) as a hands-on community involvement component for families and to add an additional layer of art to the playground. The HPCC is partnering with the local, non-profit Pittsburgh Glass Center (PGC) to plan and execute these mosaics. PGC has done a wide-variety of public art projects like this and is well-prepared to support community involvement in the creation of the mosaics.

The HPCC is also working closely with Andrea Ketzler, Senior Landscape Architect for the City of Pittsburgh, who is leading the Super Playground renovation project. The HPCC is the steward of a maintenance fund that has been used to pay for maintenance for the playground throughout its life. As the new playground will be officially under the care of the City of Pittsburgh, the HPCC is seeking ways to use the remaining maintenance funds to add additional polish and community-oriented details to the new playground, like this project.

This community art project is still in the planning stages. Below is a brief summary of the current direction. There are two main components: 1) Small “Hidden” mosaics embedded on surfaces in the playground, and 2) A larger community garden to be placed along one of the planting beds.
“Hidden” Mosaics

Inspired by similar mosaics at the Pittsburgh Zoo, and the idea of hidden elements like the tiny figures throughout The Playground at Riverfront Park in Aspinwall, these 10 hidden mosaics will be small pieces, assembled by local glass artists that will be embedded into the actual playground. These pieces will be tucked onto the reclaimed wood and natural stone pieces that are being incorporated as nature-play and seating areas within the new playground footprint. The goal is for the pieces to feel like a surprise scavenger hunt for children to discover as they play and explore the area.

Reference Images:

Example small mosaics made by Pittsburgh Glass Center artists

Mosaics embedded at the Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium
Community Garden Mosaic Mural

The community garden is envisioned to be a mural-like mosaic featuring flowers made by local families and community members. PGC will host a mosaic-making event in Highland Park near the playground and/or offer take-home kits for local residents to make their own unique flowers. Then PGC artists will embed these community-made flowers in a mural-like mosaic that will be mounted along one of several new landscape beds that will frame the updated perimeter of the new playground. In this way local children, families, and residents can contribute a unique and special personal piece to the playground. This community garden mural will represent the creativity and collaborative spirit of the community that created the original Super Playground and continues to support it as the playground receives its renovation. It will also add a beautiful year-round splash of welcoming color to the front of the playground.

Reference Images:

Example flower mosaics made using kits that the Pittsburgh Glass Center provides.

Example of a prior public art project from the Pittsburgh Glass Center - an elaborately decorated Little Lending Library with a garden motif.