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/rco.
- 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:  
- [X] Conceptual Review
- [ ] 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 ____/____/____

Permanent?
- [ ] No
- [X] Yes
Conceptual Review for Art in Parks
The Urban Conga

Project Location

Address: Highland Park – exact location to be determined

Neighborhood: Highland Park

Applicant Information

Name: Sarah Minnaert, Public Art & Civic Design Division, Department of City Planning

Mailing Address: 200 Ross St, 4th Floor, Pittsburgh PA 15219
Phone: 412.255.8996 Email: sarah.minnaert@pittsburghpa.gov
Relationship or Role in Project: Public Art & Civic Design Manager
The Urban Conga is a Brooklyn, NY-based award-winning multidisciplinary design studio comprised of a diverse group of creatives. Their work is focused on exploring the idea of a “Playable City” as an ecosystem of multiscale playable opportunities for all demographics intertwined within the urban landscape. Their work investigates how these often once overlooked, or underutilized situations can turn into stimulating creative outlets that impact our cities and communities’ health, equity, social, and economic values. They achieve this by working with communities to create inclusive, engaging, and site-specific work that evokes creativity, exploration, and free-choice learning within the built environment. Their work looks at shifting the narrative of public art away from just being a photogenic monument on a pedestal and transforming it into an open-ended, timeless piece of art that constantly changes and responds to the people, the landscape, and the interactions between them. They are continually pushing to develop transformative moments that coexist harmoniously with the surrounding context while also becoming an iconic landmark representing the area they are working within. The work evokes memorable experiences that keep inviting people to come back and engage with the work itself, the space, and each other in new ways. Designing opportunities that break down social barriers and bring people together within the public realm. They accomplish this by creating various scaled work with multitudes of functions and interactions based on the needs and wants of the places and communities they are working within.

Community engagement is a critical component in The Urban Conga’s process. They achieve this by using participatory design methods that utilize play methodologies to ensure that the quiet person in the back has as much voice as the loud ones in the front. Their engagement process isn’t about checking a box; it is about developing a relationship with the community and understanding what they want to discuss and see within their surrounding environment. The studio becomes a tool for the community to create work that the community feels represents them. This relationship starts from the beginning of the process and continues throughout the project. The work not only represents the identity of the direct area but also allows others to add their own identity to the work and space creating a communal opportunity that is transformative to the user. The community develops a deeper sense of ownership and value around the work and the space by utilizing this process.

Through this work, The Urban Conga has collaborated with communities, organizations, businesses, governments, and institutions worldwide delivering permanent multiscale public artwork, playable interventions, workshops, development plans, and public policy recommendations. Their unique team of creatives understands how to make work that is ever-changing and responsive, but also durable and long lasting within the public realm. They utilize universal design principles to create work that is safe, inclusive and engaging for all.
PROJECT NARRATIVE:

To create a project for the community, the process must be driven by the community. Community engagement is a critical component in the work that we do at The Urban Conga. Before we start designing or coming up with conceptual ideas, we must hear and understand the voices and needs of the community we are working within. To achieve this, we started our design process with several simple questions to the community. One of those questions was, “What does Highland Park mean to you? Describe in a single word, color, symbol, or phrase.” This question begins to get people to talk about their perceived identity of the space and community. Some described Highland Park as home, a quiet niche, a place to see people, a single clear chime, and even the Miles Davis song “Blue in Green.” This dialog with the community helps us understand what the park means to different people and allows us to see common trends to translate into our design. These participatory design methods drive our creative process for creating work that the community will be proud of and take ownership over in the end. We initially started this process through the city engage page, but also did an in-person passive engagement session at the park for several hours along with several other in-person meetings with local stakeholders. During these sessions, we strive to create a dialog with the community to understand the individual perspectives of the park, what they might want to see, and even where it might go. This dialog will continue throughout our process and be a part of the work itself.

From these initial discussions with the community, we noticed trends pointing to several key locations in the park. The first of those areas was Mt. Bigelow, and the next area was around Carnegie Lake. Based on the communities’ initial feedback, we are beginning to explore two areas as opportunities for the work to reside. We are not fixed to these exact areas, and as we collect more information and feedback through these discussions, the locations and concept will begin to become more defined through the process.

Another trend that came up often in discussion about Highland Park was that it was one of the most diversly used parks in Pittsburgh. The term “regional park” came up often in our conversations and commonly showcased that the park isn’t just utilized by the local residents. It’s a place where many different people from all over Pittsburgh come together to do a wide variety of activities. The work we create needs to represent and add to this diverse usage of the park. Many community members talked about connecting people within the park and creating an opportunity for these different groups to intermingle. Others were thinking of wayfinding and directional components that could help guide people through the park. Some discussed wanting to see a more tranquil space for one to maybe put up a hammock. From this initial feedback, we have begun to think about what the work could start to provide for the space and how it can become more than just an art piece, but become a transformative opportunity for the community to connect, listen, and learn from each other and the park itself. A timeless landmark that utilizes play methodologies to break down social barriers and connect people within the park. With this understanding of the park, we don’t want the concept to be just an object focused inward on itself. Instead, we want it to become a catalyst for exploration within the park and the variety of activities already happening within it. The work becomes a functional additive component for the park, providing a way of discovery and exploration as well as a destination.
As we move forward with developing our concept more, we will be continuing to collect feedback and information from the community and local stakeholders. For us, this process is critical in creating an equitable piece of art that the community is proud of and will take ownership around. We are excited about this opportunity and look forward to developing the concept with the community and its stakeholders to get a final design over the next month.
HIGHLAND PARK

the URBAN CONGA

www.thearbanconga.com

HIGHLAND PARK
art in the park
THE URBAN CONGA IS A MULTIDISCIPLINARY DESIGN STUDIO FOCUSED ON SPARKING COMMUNITY ACTIVITY AND SOCIAL INTERACTION THROUGH OPEN-ENDED PLAY. WE ACHIEVE THIS BY WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES TO CREATE INCLUSIVE, ENGAGING, AND SITE SPECIFIC WORK THAT EVOKES CONVERSATION, EXPLORATION, AND INSPIRATION.
PLAY IS OUR NATURAL DRIVER TO DISCOVER, EXPLORE, AND INTERACT WITH OTHERS.
WHAT DOES HIGHLAND PARK MEAN TO YOU?

*some input by community members
OPTION 01: Potential location for artwork could be on the top of Mt. Bigelow. This location would potentially need to have foundation poured for artwork. This location allows for the work to be a visible landmark for social activity while also engaging outward to lead you to different areas of the park.

OPTION 02: Potential location for artwork could be at the base of Mt. Bigelow. This location would potentially need to have foundation poured for artwork. This location also allows for the work to be a landmark along the main drive while also engaging outward to lead you to different areas of the park and can begin to connect with some of the trail heads as well.

OPTION 03: Potential location for artwork could be along the entry path to the pool. This location would potentially need to have foundation poured for artwork. This area seems to already be along an active path and it can begin to become a place for different groups to connect and engage while also becoming a place to find out about different events and activities going on throughout the park.

OPTION 04: Potential location for artwork could be at Carnegie lake on concrete piers. No foundation should be needed and this piece can potentially bolt into the concrete pier. This location could be a functional element for people utilizing the lake in different ways such as fishing and other activities.

Potential Locations for Artwork

HIGHLAND PARK
POTENTIAL SITE OPTION 01: TOP OF MT. BIGELOW

This location is the central peak point within the park. The art work can begin to respond to this location by becoming an everchanging landmark providing a social space for people to gather as well as becoming a wayfinding component that leads people to other areas within the park. The piece becomes a meet-up spot for people to connect and engage with each other, the work, and the surrounding landscape in new ways. With the location’s close proximity to the reservoir, we see the work beginning to create a playful dialogue around sustainability and the history of the park and reservoir. The work would highlight and frame different views of the park from the top of the hill, encouraging people to discover and explore new areas they might have not once traveled to before. The piece responds to the communities’ feedback around the need for social spaces that encourage different groups using the park to interact while also providing opportunities for people to discover new areas and activities within the park. The work becomes an outward facing landmark that responds to the people, the landscape, and the interactions between them.
POTENTIAL SITE OPTION 02: BASE OF MT. BIGELOW OFF RESERVOIR DRIVE

This location sits at one of the main entries to the reservoir along the side of Mt. Bigelow, and across the street of the trailhead. We see this artwork becoming a social connector between spaces. The artwork would become a visual beacon as people travel through the park either by car, bike, walking, or other forms of transportation. It becomes a multifunctional platform for people to connect with each other and the surrounding landscape while traveling through the park.

The artwork would become an adaptable playful opportunity, allowing the user to engage directly with the work, the surrounding landscape, and the interactions between them. Similar to the first location, the artwork would include a wayfinding component, potentially breaking into fragments that could be located in different areas around the park—creating an opportunity for exploration and discovery through the park. This wayfinding component would be open-ended and changeable to allow for different experiences as the park shifts and changes with the seasons and time. It becomes a memorable landmark in the space, shifting and adapting to its surrounding context and users while sparking conversation on the park’s past, present, and future.
POTENTIAL SITE OPTION 03: BETWEEN SWIMMING POOL & CARNEGIE LAKE

The community highlighted this location as being a place utilized by a wide variety of demographics participating in various activities. This is a well-traveled area within the park that attracts visitors from all over the region. We see the artwork utilizing its diverse users to become an adaptable platform for the user to make it their own. The work would potentially sit between the two trees on the site serving as a social hub that encourages spontaneous, playful interactions. The piece would not only become a communal social space but would become a transformative message board for the community to let others know about the different events and activities happening within the park. This adaptive component within the work creates an opportunity for people to put their individual identity onto the work and the space. The piece begins to transform and highlight what is happening around it. Like most of these concepts, the artwork becomes an outward-facing gesture that encourages people to explore the park, and its wide variety of visitors and activities in new ways. The artwork becomes a communal place for Highland Park and the surrounding regions to connect, discover, and grow together.
POTENTIAL SITE OPTION 04: CARNEGIE LAKE FISHING PLATFORM

This location already has a lot of activity and function, so we would be proposing a piece that would accentuate the activities that already happen within this space. Multiple people highlighted this area as a place of memories. A place they grew up going to and utilizing in different ways. We want the artwork not to take away from the simple nature of the space but to become a catalyst for future memorable experiences. The artwork would serve as a functional and educational component sparking moments of free-choice learning and connection between people utilizing the dock. The artwork will utilize play methodologies to create a social opportunity for people to share their stories and converse about the area’s past, present, and future. The piece would also become an everchanging visual experience from the other side of the lake that would come to life through the activities happening on the dock. This interaction would begin to create a connection between people on the docks and land. The artwork serves as a functional opportunity to connect people to the water and natural landscape as well as each other.
WHAT'S NEXT?

we will continue to engage with the community to further develop our concept