Art Commission Application

Art in Parks: The Urban Conga in Highland Park

Final Review

Project Location:
Highland Park, adjacent to the swimming pool
Neighborhood: Highland Park

Applicant(s):
Public Art & Civic Design Division
The Urban Conga

Project Duration: Permanent
Has this project come before Art Commission before? Yes
If yes, when? Oct 2021
RCO District: Yes
Development Activities Meeting: Yes, the DAM has been held
ARTIST BIO / STATEMENT:

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 workshops, 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 developed a series of three concepts that explored different site locations identified by the community around the park. Through continued feedback the community narrowed it down to one specific concept and location within the park. The trending feedback was that community members and park users wanted to see something within the underutilized space between the Highland Park pool and Carnegie Lake. This area was highlighted as an area in the park that is often used by different demographics of people participating in a variety of activities that don’t necessarily engage with one another. The piece is designed as a connector not only between the physical spaces but between the people utilizing these spaces. This area of the park has a long history of social connection and divide with it being one of the first integrated pools in Pittsburgh and one of the most diversely used parks in the city. The work titled “Together” is meant to serve as a communal platform for people to listen, learn, and connect with one another about the past, present, and future of the park and surrounding area. Its open-ended design allows for members of the community to make it their own space while creating interactions with others also using the space. The flowing form begins to hug the trees from a distance to create a relationship between not only the users but also the user and the surrounding landscape. The art work changes and shifts from providing various social seating opportunities to table tops where people can have lunch or a quick conversation. The carved-out coves of the flowing form allow for activities or events to begin to be programmed within the work and space. The structural components of the work are designed to allow for visibility through the work and providing a light touch within the landscape.

The artwork becomes a multifunctional timeless landmark that utilizes different open-ended play methodologies to break down social barriers and begin to connect people with each other and the park itself. It becomes not just a visual piece but a functional additive component for the park, providing a way of discovery and exploration as well as a destination. The artwork comes to life through the interactions of the community and surrounding landscape.
MATERIAL SPECIFICATIONS:
*review drawings for specifics
- Powder coated aluminum structure: RAL 1018.
- 2” Aluminum tubes with 1/8” wall thickness.
- Concrete footers.

ESTIMATED BUDGET BREAKDOWN:

Total Budget: $60,000

Design Development
- **Artist Fee:** $10,800 - (18% of total budget for project management, community engagement, and design development.)
- **Structural Engineer:** $1,500 – (sign and seal engineering drawings)

Fabrication
- **Materials:** $19,000
- **Fabrication Services:** $15,200 – (welding, laser cutting, powder coating.)

Installation
- **Transportation:** $3,000 - (Packing and delivery of the artwork.)
- **Contractor:** $5,000 – (site prep and pouring concrete footers)
- **Install:** $2,500 – (install of artwork by The Urban Conga team)

Contingency
- **Contingency:** $3,000 (5% buffer to account for unexpected expenditures or changes in cost of materials/services.)
HIGHLAND PARK

ART IN THE PARK

THE URBAN CONGA

WWW.THEURBANCONGA.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 EMPATHIZE WITH OTHERS.
WHAT DOES HIGHLAND PARK MEAN TO YOU?
*below is input provided by community members

meeting friends  a place to see people

caring  racially integrated

intersection  fresh  woods

communing with nature

community  home  fun

long walks  active

dog walks  peaceful

dogs  dog walking

water

dog walks

friends  diversity

jazz

peaceful  magical

calm

big trees  vast

exercise

outdoor time

get unplugged

friends  diversity

jazz

peaceful  magical

calm

big trees  vast

exercise

outdoor time

get unplugged

friends  diversity

jazz

peaceful  magical

calm

big trees  vast

exercise

outdoor time

get unplugged
This first working concept was designed to be a communal landmark at the top of Mt. Bigelow serving as an open-ended programmable opportunity framing various views of the surrounding context. It is designed to be a space for concerts, moments of solitude, communal conversations, and much more. The space becomes an open-ended playable platform for the community and visitors to connect to the surrounding landscape, the reservoir, and each other in new ways. Its unique form was inspired by the Ginkgo Biloba leaf, which is one of the oldest living tree species in the world and Highland Park is known for containing the largest and oldest Ginkgo tree in Pittsburgh. The fan-shaped piece opens up to the reservoir and frames out filtered views and moments of the park and surrounding space. The piece comes to life through the communal activities and connections it sparks within the space.

This second working concept was designed to be a communal social space between the entry of the Highland Park Pool and Carnegie Lake. Based on the communal feedback, these are places in the park that are used often by different demographics of people that don't necessarily engage with one another. This piece becomes a connector not only between the physical spaces but between the people utilizing these spaces. It becomes a communal platform for people to listen, learn, and connect with one another about the past, present, and future of the space. The open-ended concept wraps around the two large trees in the space while transforming its functions from social seating to table tops. Its flowing form between the trees is meant to accentuate the value of nature and connect the user to the surrounding landscape.

The third working concept was designed as a series of fragments throughout Highland Park, marking the trails while also serving as moments of reflection and connection to the surrounding environment. There would be three or four different pieces throughout the park in various locations. One fragment would be off within one trail as a moment of surprise hidden within nature. Each fragment would be made with polished aluminum that reflects the surrounding environment allowing the work to change and respond to the landscape, the people, and the interactions between them. There will be one or several words, proverbs, or sayings on each fragment. These will be driven by the communities’ feedback and meant to spark moments of conversation and contemplation.
TOGETHER
a communal platform to listen, learn, and share
This location was chosen through community feedback to serve as a communal bridge sparking social connection between different areas of activity within the park. The piece will sit between the two existing trees at the site location between the Highland Park Pool and Lake Carnegie.
NOTES:
1. This work is being adapted based on clarification on root lines and updated site survey.
2. The work was designed based off community feedback and to accommodate preexisting uses within the space.
3. A structural engineer will review the drawings and provide footing details and options for footing design to be less evasive to the groundscape.
4. This concept can change and adapt based on the communities feedback but the location, general form, and primary functions will remain the same.

18" SOD Tube footings poured 3' deep with 1" anchor bolts pending structural review, typ.

The work would be made out of aluminum and then powder coated.

The seating provided will sit at 18" and then range up and down to serve as variety of different open ended social spaces.