Art in Parks - Sans façon in Riverview Park

Conceptual Review

Project Location:
Riverview Park
Neighborhood: Perry North

Applicant(s):
Department of City Planning
Sans façon & Steve Gurysh

Project Duration: Permanent
Has this project come before Art Commission before? Yes
If yes, when? January 2022, Conceptual Review (tabled)
RCO District: No
Development Activities Meeting: n/a
Riverview Park
Art in Parks
Sans façon / Steve Gurysh
Introduction

Following the presentation in January of the Concept Outline introducing the special character and context of Riverview Park and the approach and opportunities for the Art in Parks project, this document outlines the concept for public artwork for Riverview Park.

We are indebted to the community, friends of Riverview Park and a number of subject matter experts who generously offered their insight, knowledge, reflections and support through the concept development. It is all the more apparent how treasured Riverview Park is and equally that to many the park’s historical, environmental and social assets are little known and under utilized.

It is no less apparent through Concept development, that with unstable slopes, roads collapsing, over-abundant deer population, and a park under-resourced, how significant a strain the ecology of the park is under.

In this context we must ask ourselves what is the place of art? It became clear through the months of research and conversations with the people who love and care for the park, for a work to resonate it had to reveal something of this existing context, expand the emotional connection for the people who love it and invite others to discover the qualities of this special place.
Engagement since January 2022

> **Community meeting**, March 10th

> **Site Visit**, March 15th, Walking tours Nancy Schaefer, Riverview Park Ranger

> Meet with potential *Pittsburgh artisans and fabricators*: woodworker, blacksmiths, March 15th

> **Tour of Tree Pittsburgh Nursery**, March 16th

> **Site Visit** with Lisa Ceoffe, Pittsburgh City Forester, March 16th

> **Allegheny Observatory Tour** with Diane Turnshek, lecturer in the Department of Physics at Carnegie Mellon University and runs the Astronomy Public Lecture Series at Allegheny Observatory, March 16th

> Meet with potential *Pittsburgh artisans and fabricators*: blacksmiths, March 17th

> **Site Visit** with Park Ranger, Public Works Parks Operations crew and Parks Conservancy, to discuss logistics, details, and project questions/concerns, March 17th

> **Site meeting** with Mark Masterson, Executive Director, *Friends of Riverview Park*, and Ralph Horgan, Parks Conservancy’s Board of Director member, March 17th
Narrative

From this ongoing process of research and continued engagement, three overlapping and complementary fields are driving our project:

**The Ecological**
Riverview Park is in an evolving ecosystem that has constantly been changing in relation to human’s interaction, from indigenous communities and their relationship to this original landscape, then a farm, a park, it is currently shrinking due to invasive plant species, diseases, overpopulation of deer. Within this context, the park is cherished for its perception as a wild place where one can be within nature and access solitude within the city limits.

**The Social**
The park also has complex overlapping uses and stories. It has a rich history of social interaction between communities and nature, it was once a place of urban horse riding, the former nature center was a thriving social place with nature classes taught at the Wissahickon Nature Center, the trails are still actively used for recreation (although many community members perceive the park as being underused by the wider Pittsburgh community), the park shelters carry the many traces of their use, as well as the ruins and their implied stories.

**The Perceptual**
The steep terrain of the park along with the presence of the Allegheny Observatory creates opportunities to reorient our perspectives, shifting our understanding of the city, the surrounding landscape, but also training our gaze both skyward and inward, to deeply speculate, drawing pictures of the future and past.

(From January’s document, Concept Outline)
ECOLOGICAL

Devastating impact of Emerald Ash Borer beetle on native Ash trees

Deer overpopulation impacting understory and accelerating erosion

Invasive Norway Maples dominate 70% of tree canopy in Riverview Park

SOCIAL

Community meal at the former Wissahickon Nature Center

Riverview’s grand opening on July 4, 1894

Urban EcoStewards and the Student Conservation Association are important carers of the Park

PERCEPTUAL

“The within the broken hills, nooks, dells and secluded spots, the young can whisper in each other’s ears and can draw pictures of the future without either paint or brush. [Laughter]”

The Allegheny Observatory is a symbol of the Park and an intangible connection to the skies

Throughout the park fallen trees highlight the steep topology, the erosion and the diversity of the ecological cycle

The ruins of the Wissahickon Nature Center are one of the hidden destinations
Proposal

A series of interwoven projects that reframe the park's existing elements

From wilderness to farmland to the grand civic gesture of creating a park for the people of the City of Allegheny, the construction of a world-renowned observatory, to today's mature woodland, this place has seen many changes. Little remains the same except the existence of a select group of trees which have witnessed it all. Where these monumental trees stand is unrecorded. Hidden amongst the invasive Norway Maples these behemoths, living ecological giants, are hidden in plain sight throughout the park.

These standing and fallen heritage trees which have stood here from before the Park's inauguration offer an emotional and visceral connection to the ecological processes of the park, the perception of a present, past and future landscape, and a reason, if one were needed, for its expanded stewardship and care.

Herein lies the place of art for Riverview park, to connect us all to these stories of place through the witnesses who stood and still stand through its changes, to establish them as a collection and expand the reach of this ancient canopy, offer to the visitor a connection with a former landscape, to continue to draw pictures of the future with custodians and community who enjoy and care for this important park.

Working with the existing elements across the entirety of the park allows us expand the reach of the project and to allocate the funds to actions rather than materials, expanding the network of artists, craftspeople and subject-matter-experts engaged in acts of caring for Riverview Park and shine a light on a large network of people who care for the park day-in day-out, from the clearing of snow, building of paths, educating people and fund-raising.
Proposal

At the inauguration of the park in 1894 Thomas M. Marshall in presenting the deed made a proclamation:

"Within its broken hills, nooks, dells and secluded spots the young can whisper in each others ears and can draw pictures of the future without either paint or brush."

It is from this poetic aspiration, that the Artwork takes its inspiration and its title.
Pictures of the future

WITNESS TREE MAPPING
Pictures of the future
Witness tree mapping

Working in collaboration with Tree Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh City Forester, we will first identify all the trees which stood on this land when the park was created in 1894 which still stand today.

Through this family of ancient trees dispersed through the park, as visitors we can build a picture of a former landscape, and in a park increasingly crowded with a single species (the Norway Maple now consist of an estimated 70% of all the tree species in Riverview Park) we can appreciate the ecological and historical evolution of our environment.

Collaborating with Tree Pittsburgh, the City Forestry team, not only does the artwork benefit from the wealth of expertise, and ensure the longer term feasibility of the project, the artwork is able to dovetail with city-wide initiatives to showcase the incredible work they do.
The cataloging of the ancestor trees of Riverview Park is yet to be undertaken, this permanent work will survey and map the heritage trees of Riverview park (this map will remain in the Park Ranger’s office / visitor center), the heritage trees identification and demarkation both encourages the exploration of the full park, celebrates one of the park’s great qualities and brings into relief the assets these living giants of the park offer both environmentally and socially.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, there are 134 native and 62 introduced species of trees found in the state, we will not discern between native and non native, rather celebrate the longevity of all heritage trees still present today.
Pictures of the future
Witness tree mapping

The map of the survey will be displayed in the Visitors Center, with the ancestor trees anticipated to be dispersed throughout the park.
Witness Tree Markers

Marking identifying trees part of the Ash Tree Conservation Program, Riverview Park.
Once identified through the survey, these trees will be demarcated permanently as standing living monuments, becoming a record, a celebration and a destination.

Joseph Beuys, *7000 Eichen (7000 Oaks)*, the planting of 7,000 trees—each paired with a columnar basalt stone approximately four feet high and positioned above ground—throughout the greater city of Kassel.

Ayşe Erkmen, *Lonesome George*, Lonesome George, the last specimen of *Achatinella apexfulva*, a Hawaiian tree snail, lived for fourteen years in a laboratory. Scientists tried in vain to find a mating partner for “the loneliest snail in the world”. With her death in January 2019, her species became extinct. The bronze sculpture is both a memorial and a monument to a lost species.
At the time of the creation of Riverview Park, a proclamation was made which speaks to both the defining character and future aspiration for the park.

As Riverview Park would come to play in people's lives, a generosity, poetry and egalitarianism underlines this proclamation.

It has not lost its poignancy or relevance and indeed its generosity is embodied in the care and dedication of the people who love and care for Riverview Park today. Its sentiment underlines the place, and still has much to offer in the attitude and magic parks may play in peoples lives.

The witness trees will be marked with a brass plate, reminiscent of standard tree markers used for municipal and scientific identification. The quote from the proclamation will be embossed on each plaque, using the standard technique and font used by the industry.

The plaques will be installed as the trees are identified during the survey.

Each time a heritage tree falls, the plaque attached to it will be collected and be displayed in the Ranger's office.
Pictures of the future
Witness tree markers

THE YOUNG CAN WHISPER IN EACH OTHER'S EARS AND CAN DRAW PICTURES OF THE FUTURE WITHOUT EITHER PAINT OR BRUSH

Stainless steel spring
Brass marker plate
Aluminum screw

Drawings are representative of the anticipated final outcome and are not intended for construction.

Artwork proposal: Elevation
Riverview Park

01 Close up of marker, street view
02 Close up of marker, section
03 Placement of marker

Stainless steel spring
Aluminum screw
Brass marker plate
Pictures of the future
Witness tree markers

The markers will be placed on each of the ancestor trees identified in the survey.
Pictures of the future

MONUMENT TO THE WITNESS TREES
In this sculptural gesture, we propose the transformation of a fallen tree in Riverview Park into a replica of one of the columns featured on the neo-classical exterior entrance of the Allegheny Observatory.

Here, we intend to work with the City Forester to select a recently fallen tree, ideally of a significant age and size. By superimposing the architecture of the observatory onto the life cycles of the forest, we seek to align the public's understanding of the longevity and timescales of these living monuments and the interplanetary perspectives explored within the observatory.

This element of the artwork will serve as a sculptural monument that will exist within the continued life cycle of the forest. The carved tree will continue to decay over time, becoming a host and habitat for microorganisms, fungi, insects, birds, other forest creatures as well as become a gathering place for park visitors.
Pictures of the future
Monument to Witness Trees

The intention is to carve the column form on site, exactly where the tree originally fell.

The carving process will act as a performance, a spectacle of the attention given to one of the fallen ancestor trees usually just ignored and lying down.

This sculptural monument to these ancient trees will become another destination in Riverview park, befitting the nature of the place.
Pictures of the future
Monument to Witness Trees
Pictures of the future

Monument to Witness Trees

Drawings are representative of the anticipated final outcome and are not intended for construction.

Monument to Witness Trees
Riverview Park

Artwork proposal: Elevation

Sans façon / Steve Gurysh

Riverview Park, May 2022
Pictures of the future
Monument to Witness Trees

Proposed location of the Monument, using a fallen ancestor oak tree. Location will be determined with City Forester and Park Ranger.
SEEDS OF RIVERVIEW PARK

Picture by James Rooney
In partnership with Tree Pittsburgh and the City Forester, seeds of these witness trees will be collected and propagated at Tree Pittsburgh’s nursery located along the Allegheny River in Lawrenceville.

Upon maturation the trees will be made available to the City Parks department for replanting in Riverview park and to be adopted by the residents of the Northside to grow in their own gardens, on private property, expanding the canopy of Riverview beyond the park.

This initiative aligns with the existing initiatives of Tree Pittsburgh, our specific goal through this part of artwork is to expand the tree canopy of the Northside with the seedlings of heritage trees, specifically those of Riverview Park.

Between 2010 and 2015, some 1,742,820 trees were lost in Allegheny County, resulting in the disappearance of more than 11,000 acres of tree coverage. That’s nearly the combined size of all nine county parks, or 13 Central Parks. An estimated 1,000 trees per day—gone—over the course of less than half a decade.
Each tree will be identified as a member of this family of trees permanently and anyone who adopts a sapling would be able to look for and find the parent tree their sapling came from through the mapping of the witness trees. This identifying and tracing back to the parent tree is not currently something which is undertaken.

Each of the Witness tree saplings will be grown in specially crafted ‘witness tree pot’, taking its form from the same column of the observatory on which the tree monument is modelled. This ceramic pot will identify the trees while growing at Tree Pittsburgh and be given to the community member who adopts the tree as it returns to the North Side to its permanent home.
The witness tree seedlings will increase the Riverview Park canopy throughout the adjoining neighbourhoods.
The park today depends on the care, generosity and hard work of a collective of individuals and organizations: the Park Ranger, friends of group, the public works team, the ecostewards, the Youth Conservation Groups, Tree Pittsburgh. This enduring care of a place under strain is a testament to the belief in the value of this park for the people of the Northside.

The Instruments of Care is a suite of tools used to plant sapling trees - carefully crafted with a process which embeds the metal material from a meteorite into the fabric of the tool.

For a park so well known for the observatory (we should perhaps call it Starview park now, as you can no longer see the river!) this tangible fragment of the solar system embedded in the tools used to care for the park is an acknowledgement of care and value so embedded in this place.

These tools will be given to the organizations who are engaged in the act of caring for Riverview Park to use in the planting of sapling trees.
Pictures of the future
Instruments of Care

Forging process used to incorporate different types of steel into one tool

Dibble bar used for sapling planting

Proposed dibble bar with specially forged blade end.
Pictures of the future

DRAWING CLASSES

Picture by Nerys Levy
Pictures of the future
Drawing classes

Each gesture of *Pictures of the Future* is intended to expand upon the qualities of place, to bring experiences and perspectives closer.

For the first calendar year, up to 30 drawing classes with an artist instructor will be available for small groups to book free of charge. An opportunity, for schools, youth or special interest groups of all ages to spend time observing the parks *broken hills, nooks dells and secluded spots* with the guidance of an instructor.

One of several drawings exhibited inside the visitors center, made by community members.
Following the carving of the monument the off-cuts from the fallen tree will be collected and processed with the help of local craftspeople to make the material for the drawing classes.

Charcoal will be made from the branches following the traditional methods of charcoal making.

Smaller pieces will be turned into pulp to produce sheets of paper.

Each sheet will be water-marked with the quote from the park’s founding proclamation.

These materials will be made available to the public along with the loan of a drawing boards from the Park Visitor Center.
The material for the drawing classes will be stored in the Visitor Center / Ranger’s office. The lessons themselves will take place throughout the park.
TELLING THE STORY

A short artist film will coalesce the component parts of *Pictures of the Future*, giving insight to the making of the works, the hands involved and an invitation familiar and unfamiliar to visit Riverview park with renewed intrigue and additional perspectives.
**Pictures of the future**

**Locations**

*THE MAP*
Located in the Visitor Centre. Entrance of the Park, open regularly, overseen by Ranger.

*THE MARKERS*
Throughout the park, acting almost as a treasure hunt to find them, some will be next to paths and trails, some will be in more remote locations. Locations will be determined by the survey.

*THE MONUMENT*
Location to be defined with Park Ranger and City Forester. We are looking for an accessible place, in proximity but not next to a trail. The size of the fallen tree and its access for sculpting will determine the exact location.

*THE SEEDLINGS*
Throughout the surrounding neighbourhoods and with Pittsburgh. The legacy of the park and the urban canopy is extended with each planting of Riverview seedling. And each new seedling is connected to an existing ancestor tree within the park.

*THE DRAWING CLASS*
The paper, charcoal and drawing boards will be stored in the Visitor Centre. The drawing will take place throughout the park.

- THE INSTRUMENTS OF CARE
- TELLING THE STORY (ONLINE)
The Instruments of Care will be used in any and all tree-planting operation in the North side.
The Artist Film will be shared online.
Pictures of the future

Anticipated schedule

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SURVEY
- Development with Tree Pbg
- Call for volunteers
- Survey
- Map production

MARKING
- Markers production
- Markers installation

MONUMENT
- Contracting carver
- Identification of tree
- Site preparation
- Carving
- Cleaning up

SEEDS
- Development with Tree Pbg
- Seed collection
- Seed preparation
- Nursery growth
- Pots production
- Seedling distribution

INSTRUMENTS OF CARE
- Contracting artisan
- Instruments making
- Instruments distribution

DRAWING CLASS
- Contracting instructor
- Paper-making
- Charcoal making
- Classes
- Public access to material

TELLING THE STORY
- Contracting filmmaker
- Production
- Release