OUTDOOR PERFORMANCE VENUE
Feasibility Study
City of Grand Rapids, MN
LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends,

The Grand Rapids Arts and Culture Roadmap, adopted by the City of Grand Rapids in early 2015, is rich with community members’ wishes that the city intentionally connect arts, heritage, and the natural environment.

The study you are about to read is a direct result of that expressed community desire. It’s also the result of a thoughtful public process that examined how the City of Grand Rapids can continue to honor its long-standing tradition of promoting arts and culture as an important part of our distinctive identity – especially along the Mississippi River.

The Arts & Culture Commission would like to thank LHB of Duluth and Minneapolis for their guidance and diligence as we crafted this feasibility study of options for developing a performing arts venue along the river. It was important to the commission that we welcomed broad public input, that ideas were financially feasible, and that environmental and economic development perspectives were considered. Thank you to the many community members and organizational partners who gave generously of their time, ideas, and expertise. It is that broad scope of input that lends this study its credibility.

It is the Arts & Culture Commission’s hope that the completed feasibility study will inspire future investment in amenities along the Mississippi. We believe that by encouraging intentional riverside enhancements, we can help strengthen a community in which residents and visitors alike will find increased connection with local art and culture — as well as with the national treasure that lays right at our doorstep.

Sonja Merrild, Chair
City of Grand Rapids Arts & Culture Commission

“I hope the City of Grand Rapids will be open to creative ideas and projects for developing buildings and lots that involve art and artists”

~ Grand Rapids Survey Respondent
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Special Thanks
Grand Rapids Area Library
KAXE, Northern Community Radio
Forest History Center

Consultant Team
LHB, Corp.
Donjek, Inc.
Bruce Jacobson
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PURPOSE

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BACKGROUND

Grand Rapids, home to over 11,000 residents and an emerging arts scene, has a rich history of arts celebration and performance.

The City’s arts and culture plan (GRMN Creates: an arts and culture roadmap) identified, through a public process, the desire to better celebrate the Mississippi River within the community. This connection of art to nature was realized during the sixty-year history of The Showboat Landing, where the Mississippi Melodie would disembark performers who would engage and delight the audience with song, dance and theatrics.

The site itself captivated audiences in part due to the spectacle of the performance but also the magic of the backdrop, the Mississippi River. It is this same magic that this current study will endeavor to capture, define and report.

Historical Record

Started in 1956 by Lois Gildemeister, the only outdoor live theater stage on the Mississippi River entertained audiences of up to 1,100 people. After serving the community for 60 years, the venue closed in 2015 in a land swap between the Blandin Paper Company and the City of Grand Rapids.

The tradition of entertainment along the banks of the Mississippi in Grand Rapids is acknowledged through the desire and commitment of the Grand Rapids Arts and Culture Commission and through the feasibility study for an outdoor performance venue, to continue the legacy of performance on the river.
CITY AND COMMISSION GOALS

The City of Grand Rapids has a rich history of arts and culture planning.

This vibrant and growing arts community plays an important economic role in the region. Arts and Culture are a core component of daily life in the community, home to cultural organizations like the Judy Garland Museum, and the Minnesota Forest History Center; to fine arts institutions like MacRostie Art Center and the Reif Performing Arts Center. Art and culture events, activities and happenings occur at all scales including the individual and small group scale. City goals and policies look to foster and enhance engagement with the arts at all levels as demonstrated in the following city planning documents, policies and programs.
PURPOSE

The Feasibility Study endeavors to clarify the need for an outdoor performance venue on the Grand Rapids Mississippi Riverfront.

This study addresses regional demand, site analysis and selection, facility operations and management, site programming, and long-term sustainability issues.

The information included within summarizes the assessment and achievability of a riverfront venue, and will be used for decision making as well as future planning regarding development of an outdoor venue site that best fits the needs of the Grand Rapids community.

Foundational Work

The Feasibility Study dovetails the goals outlined in the 2015 Arts and Culture Roadmap (GRMN Creates):

- Goal 1: Enhance Grand Rapids’ distinctive identity through arts and culture
- Goal 2: Expand opportunities for lifelong arts learning
- Goal 3: Foster inclusive arts and cultural offerings and expand access
- Goal 4: Use the arts to animate the physical realm and improve connectivity
- Goal 5: Foster support for artists and arts and cultural organizations
STUDY OBJECTIVES

The City of Grand Rapids, through the Arts and Culture Commission, sought proposals for the development of a feasibility study in 2016.

Guided by the goals identified in the City’s arts and culture plan (GRMN Creates: an arts and culture roadmap) the Commission invited the LHB consultant team to examine, evaluate, measure and summarize the need for and potential users of a new or expanded outdoor entertainment venue on the Grand Rapids Mississippi Riverfront. As part of the study the Commission required a public process with the objective of promoting meaningful participation while fostering a sense of ownership among community members. The study divided in two phases assessed the following:

Phase 1
• Evaluate, measure and summarize the need for and potential users of a new or expanded outdoor entertainment venue on the Grand Rapids Riverfront.
• Evaluation of present facilities.
• Examine local management capabilities.
• Provide examples of successful facility management structures in other communities.
• Provide relevant data pertaining to the economic benefit of similar venues.

Phase 2
• Gather input and evaluate up to three site options for outdoor performance venues.
• Develop preliminary spatial requirements for program features.
• Develop a preliminary budget.
• Examine minimum operating procedures.
• Provide a preliminary project schedule.
STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

The role of the stakeholder is to give voice to the priorities and concerns of a community, including to advocate for the best interests of the community.

Unique to the project was the level of sophisticated input and engagement the project received from neighbors, organizations, business owners, and non-profits. Of greatest value, was the role of the Grand Rapids Arts and Culture Commission who fostered enriching opportunities for discussion, collaboration and creativity. The process included the creation of a Working Group, made up of five Commissioners, who provided valuable insight and guidance to the LHB team throughout the process. This included affirming project goals and objectives, developing guiding principles and attendance of several meetings with the consultant team, community members and City staff. Indicated below are some of the many stakeholders we engaged as part of the public process.
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To maximize and measure success of the project

The Working Group was asked to define specific, yet flexible principles to guide the study. Defining project priorities and vision through the development of guiding principles ensured project stakeholders remained organized, focused and decisive throughout the evolution of the study. To the right, represents the measurable outcomes of success for the Outdoor Performance Venue Feasibility Study.

Reflect a broad range of community ideas and voices
Engage a broad cross-section of the community to co-create a process and design that best reflects our area.

Provide a unique Mississippi River experience
Develop a design for a venue that strengthens our community’s relationship with the river.

Ensure a financially feasible project
Ensure the scope of project is within the community’s capacity to build and sustain.

Create an environmentally sustainable space
Incorporate local resources in an authentic way minimizing the impact on surrounding landscape and showcasing the natural habitat of the Mississippi River.

Promote economic development
Accommodate and encourage a diverse range of local and regional uses and act as a catalyst for community connections and growth.
The feasibility study analyzed three sites: The Forest History Center, Northern Community Radio, and Veteran’s Memorial Park. Based on input and direction from the community public meeting during Phase 1, it was determined that two sites should advance to Phase 2 study. The sites that were explored in more depth were Forest History Center and Northern Community Radio.
REGIONAL DEMAND ANALYSIS
Demographic Snapshot

Successful outdoor performance venues happen in vibrant communities.
The pool of comparables includes communities ranging in population from 2,500 to
60,000 and included venues in riverfront, lakeside, pastoral and urban settings. Resident
artists in Grand Rapids comprise the highest proportion of the community among these
cities, and Grand Rapids ranks in the middle of the field in terms of number of arts-related
establishments overall. (see bottom two graphs).

Our overview also included research on successful outdoor performance spaces and
interviews of their managers. Models vary in terms of ownership, maintenance,
management and programming of these performance venues.

REGIONAL DEMAND ANALYSIS
Cost of Living Index

Factors contributing to income available to arts spending.

The capacity of venue in discussion in Grand Rapids, 300-600, places the space among the smaller group of comparables; generally, these venues have been owned and maintained by cities as one of several public spaces. In each case, programming of the space has been handled by a designated party with experience in event management and performance specifically.

![Bar chart showing median housing as percent of median income for various cities, including Grand Rapids, with percentages ranging from 16% to 24%.](chart)

## COMPARABLES EVALUATION

### A Study of eight regional venues

A field of eight community facilities in Minnesota and Wisconsin were reviewed to support the examination and study of the ability of Grand Rapids to support an outdoor performance venue. In the review, features considered included the local marketplace, demography, housing characteristics, and characteristics of the arts environment in each community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>City Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand Rapids Riverfront</td>
<td>Grand Rapids, MN</td>
<td>Riverfront</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>11,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staring Lake Amphitheater</td>
<td>Eden Prairie, MN</td>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River’s Edge Commons Park</td>
<td>Elk River, MN</td>
<td>Riverfront</td>
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<td>23,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vetter Stone Amphitheater</td>
<td>Mankato, MN</td>
<td>Riverfront</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Park Outdoor Amphitheater</td>
<td>New Ulm, MN</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>13,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Superior Big Top Chautauqua</td>
<td>Bayfield, WI</td>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrace Mill</td>
<td>Glenwood, MN</td>
<td>Riverfront</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weesner Family Amphitheater</td>
<td>Apple Valley, MN</td>
<td>Pastoral</td>
<td>1,450</td>
<td>50,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluestem Amphitheater</td>
<td>Moorhead, MN</td>
<td>Riverfront</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>39,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Donjek analysis and interviews._
COMPARABLES EVALUATION

Metrics Evaluated included individual facility characteristics and market measures

Facility Metrics
- Capacity
- Setting
- ADA Accessibility
- Temporary vs. Permanent
- Seating
- Views

Market Metrics
- City population.
- City employment including by age demographic.
- Artist Population.
- Median household income and median housing cost.
- Art establishments, payroll and total receipts.

River's Edge Commons Park
Elk River

German Park Outdoor Amphitheater
New Ulm

Lake Superior Big Top Chautauqua
Washburn/Bayfield, WI

Vetter Stone Amphitheater
Mankato

Terrace Mill
Willmar

Staring Lake Amphitheatre
Eden Prairie

Bluestem Amphitheater
Moorhead

Weesner Family Amphitheater
Apple Valley

The Showboat Landing
Grand Rapids

Outdoor Performance Venue Feasibility Study
Grand Rapids, Minnesota
City of Grand Rapids Arts and Culture Commission

June 2017
**Findings concluded an outdoor performance venue would be viable in Grand Rapids.**

**Perspectives**

Outdoor performance venues are viable in multiple Minnesota markets that are larger and smaller than Grand Rapids.

- In selected interviews, stakeholders describe a wide range of uses and user groups who could utilize an outdoor performance venue.
- Funding of ongoing maintenance and operations is most likely a local responsibility with limited event revenue.
- Demonstrated interest and advocacy, and sufficient market, indicate viability of a permanent performance venue on the Mississippi River in Grand Rapids.

“There seems to me no lack of interest around Grand Rapids. KAXE has a nice stage and it's a good program. But it's only one week per summer they produce an event. In my view, the key question is can the site accommodate needs like food and traffic ongoing?”

“All the planning by the City and others points toward a riverfront venue. State legislators liked the Forest History Center site because parking, ticketing, restrooms, all are on site already; facilities management bandwidth already in place. An agreement with the City and others that use it – this could work well.”

“The Showboat was a big loss, but the level of interest in performance has only grown in recent years. Especially if linked up with partners like the Reif or the School District, I’m very confident a venue would be a huge success.”
FOREST HISTORY CENTER
Existing Conditions

The Forest History Center owned and operated by the Minnesota Historical Society, is located on 171.5 acres of land. The land is a blend of forest, grassland and wetland offering expansive views of the Mississippi River. The site is notable because of its unique topography which rises at its core surrounded by lowlands to the east and bluffs to the west.

- Estimate Site Acreage: 110 Acres
- Shoreline Frontage: 5,288 Feet
- Parcel Count: 9 (MN Historical Society and Blandin Paper Company)
The Forest History Center sits on parcels owned by the Minnesota Historical Society, but is adjacent to both Blandin Paper Company owned sites and the Longyear Realty Company. There may be opportunity for future expansion on the adjacent parcels to the west, depending on market and political forecasts.

Site Features
- The Forest History Center is handicapped accessible.
- Parking for approximately 120 cars.
- Over 5 miles of nature trails.
- A range of ecosystems exist on the site, including old growth forest, pine plantation, and lowland marsh.
- Water and sewer connected to the south portion of the site.
- Located roughly 4 miles from town center.
- Site is located upstream from the Blandin dam where the river is considerable in width.
FOREST HISTORY CENTER
Site Issues and Constraints

The site is distinguished by its natural features and the sense of seclusion it offers visitors. The natural setting, creates a sense of enclosure and enhances the rustic qualities of the site. The challenges of the Forest History Center site include:

- Distance to center of town is perceived to be far.
- Public transportation/alternative modes of transportation are limited.
- Potential for competing activities or events could impact scheduling or programming.
- Necessity to build additional amenities to serve a new performance venue would be required.
- Potential for noise impacts, both coming into the site (from neighboring industries) as well as noise leaving the site are a concern.
- Perceived complexity and limitations working with the Minnesota Historical Society.
- Much of the site within the MN Historical Society property may be off-limits due to environmentally sensitive areas, such as the old growth forest, and wetlands along the shoreline.
- Distance from existing infrastructure (parking, utilities) to new riverfront venue is considerable.
- Significant site upgrades would likely be required for river proximity and to accommodate ADA accessibility.
**FOREST HISTORY CENTER**

*Site Opportunities*

The Forest History Center is peppered with architecturally relevant features including a fire tower, a themed logging camp, a visitor’s center and a 1930’s Minnesota Forest Service cabin. Opportunities include:

- A unique combination of nature themed experiences and educational opportunities through its exhibits, demonstrations and tours.
- A successful collaboration could be realized.
- A beloved destination in Itasca County and beyond, engaging thousands of visitors every year.
- The site has been host to weddings, concerts, festivals, and conferences and has the capacity to serve a range of uses and scale of activities.
- Beyond the physical site, the location has a strong network of supporters and a leadership structure in the Minnesota Historical Society to buoy programming and marketing of events at the site.
NORTHERN COMMUNITY RADIO
Existing Conditions

The Northern Community Radio site is owned by the radio station and sits adjacent to their broadcast building. Located on four acres, the site is distinguished by its immediacy to the river and gentle slope. A city trail bisects the site. Some formal plantings skirt the broadcast building and library. The site is primarily unshaded offering southern exposure with views to the river.

- Estimate Site Acreage: 4 Acres
- Shoreline Frontage: 635 Feet
- Parcel Count: 5 (City Owned/Northern Community Radio)
The Northern Community Radio site is maintained and operated by both City and KAXE. The City executes trail maintenance on the river trail, while lawn mowing services and site programming is managed by KAXE. KAXE is an independent, nonprofit organization operating two unique community based public radio stations, one in Grand Rapids and one in Bemidji.

Site Features
- The Northern Community Radio site is handicapped accessible.
- Event parking is shared, utilizing both the Library lots and the lot at the intersection of 2nd St. and 3rd Ave.
- Water and electric connected.
- Existing public art interspersed throughout.
- Existing tent/canopy structure for performances.
- Adjacent to public library.
- Located less than .5 miles from town center.
- Site is located downstream from the Blandin dam where the river is narrow and intimate.
NORTHERN COMMUNITY RADIO
Site Issues and Constraints

*The site is well known and highly regarded*

In town as a destination for events. It however has been challenged by its size and the design of the existing stage structure which creates a barrier to the river. The challenges of the Northern Community Radio site include:

- Elevation and proximity to river. The site is within the 100-year floodplain, which restricts certain types of structures to be constructed within designated shoreline setbacks.
- Wetlands appear to be present along the shoreline; avoiding or minimally impacting these environmentally sensitive areas will limit the development footprint.
- Little flexibility due to site size; can only accommodate small to medium size crowds (500 or less).
- Undesirable activity is occurring in perimeter areas and would need to be mitigated.
- Proximity to adjacent neighborhoods may create noise conflicts.

- The existing radio tower is an undesirable structure which may create a site or circulation constraint as relocating the tower may not be feasible.
The Northern Community Radio Site

is adjacent to downtown and the library. Opportunities include:

- It offers great connectivity by trail, bike, vehicle and public transit.
- The site features adequate open space and immediate access to the river both visually and physically by dock and trail.
- The site is proximate to a new pedestrian bridge programmed for implementation in 2018. This would give immediate access to those on the south side of the river to travel to events on foot.
- Situated next to the library, the site allows for natural synergies with programming, collaboration and existing partnerships.
- The site is also visible from the Pokegama Avenue bridge, offering excellent exposure to passersby.
ENGAGEMENT

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Two-Day Workshop ................................... 26-29
Public Meeting #2 .................................... 30-31
PUBLIC MEETING #1

February 1, 2017

The City and the Grand Rapids Arts and Culture Commission along with consultants hosted the first of two public meetings to report on Phase 1 findings and to gather input and feedback on the feasibility and need for an outdoor performance venue. Approximately 35 individuals participated in small group discussions covering topics ranging from project values, site benefits and drawbacks, opportunities, and priority features. Below represent preliminary perspectives:

**Forest History Center**

**Benefits**
- Beautiful setting.
- Site character “feels like Grand Rapids.”
- Potential for shared or complimentary programming with the Minnesota Historical Society.

**Drawbacks**
- Not very close to Downtown.
- May not provide as much economic opportunity for town center growth.
- Concern over future potential industrial uses adjacent to site.
- Limited/seasonal hours (gated entrance).

**Northern Community Radio**

**Benefits**
- Walkable from Downtown.
- Potential to adapt to a range of event types.
- Existing trails connect broadly to community.

**Drawbacks**
- Radio tower location may pose a constraint to design.
- Site will require additional investment in amenities.
- Existing undesirable uses occurring at the site.

**Veteran’s Memorial Park**

**Benefits**
- Site topography could be utilized for amphitheater style seating.
- Pedestrian bridge connects to Oakland Park & adjacent neighborhood.
- Intimate setting.

**Drawbacks**
- Would require site modifications that may impact existing tree canopy.
- Site will require significant investment in amenities (i.e. utilities & parking lot).
- Dog Park may need relocation.
ONLINE SURVEY

An alternative way to gather community feedback was executed through the collection of survey responses on four questions. A weblink was hosted on the City’s website for a duration of eight weeks. The intention was to gather specific data on preferences, perceptions and desires for the programming, partnership and amenities desired at an outdoor performance venue. Oftentimes online surveys are used to gather more candid responses from an alternative sector of the population. The intention of the survey was not to vote on most popular features but to gather a cross-section of perspectives from a portion of the community who may not have engaged through meetings.

Is there a local organization in town that is best suited to run and operate an outdoor performance venue?

What chief amenities would an outdoor performance venue host?


ONLINE SURVEY

Respondents to the online survey offered specific feedback when asked:

“What is the measure of success for an outdoor performance venue in Grand Rapids?”

This type of question often reveals more intimate responses, which can provide guidelines for project implementation and post project evaluation.

“Venue does not take away from other venues”

“Community has a sense of ownership”

“Diversity of attendees”

“People who attended leave fulfilled by the event”

“Regular programming schedule”

“Ultimately contributes to quality of life of people who live here”

“It’s a beautiful and cozy and cool place to hang out.”

“Attendance”

“We need a site that will continue to engage the broader community and our visitors”

“Self-sustaining”

“Honors the setting and the river, and enhances the community”

“Quality entertainment at a good price”
### 2-DAY WORKSHOP

**Site Evaluation**

Stakeholders were asked to compare several site variables to determine the feasibility for an outdoor performance venue. The evaluation parameters were broken into four categories:

- Ecological Attributes, Physical Characteristics
- Site Development Considerations
- Political Characteristics

The purpose of the exercise was to evaluate the Commission’s priorities and their perspectives and perceptions of the success of either site. The exercise challenged the group to ask themselves:

- Which site offers the greatest opportunity to strengthen the community’s relationship to the river?
- Which site is most likely positioned to be a catalyst for community connections and growth?

Based on the accumulated results, the Northern Community Radio site offered twice as many positive attributes than the Forest History Center site.

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**April 4-5, 2017**

The LHB consultant team facilitated a 2-day workshop to address operational strategies, site programming and exploration of two site options.

#### Site Evaluation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SITE</th>
<th>Ecological Attributes</th>
<th>Physical Characteristics</th>
<th>Site Development Considerations</th>
<th>Political Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forest History Center</td>
<td>+1  0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Community Radio</td>
<td>0  0</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KEY**

- PLUS
- MINUS
- NEUTRAL

**Can You Think of Other Criteria?**

- [Image of workshop participants and facilitator]
2-DAY WORKSHOP

Design Priorities Listening Session

The purpose of the listening session was to dig deeper into design priorities including identifying operational must-haves and exploring different partnership models and roles. The first exercise, LHB requested the group to identify the most important features using an operational requirements matrix developed to prioritize key features and facilities as part of the outdoor venue. The Commission reviewed three categories of operational requirements; Facilities Program, Security/Maintenance, Management. Within the categories, the Commission discussed the level of service provided for key areas or program elements. The findings include:

**Facilities Program**

- Bathrooms: Must Have-portable toilets, Desired-flush toilets.
- Site Furnishings: Must Have-moderate furnishings including trash receptacles, benches, bike racks, signage, etc.
- Venue Seating: Must Have-a combination of designated seating and lawn seating.
- Designated Parking: Must Have-minimum of 50 spaces, Desired-up to 100 spaces, explore overflow and shuttle-based parking alternatives.
- Concessions: Must Have-a flexible outdoor space with concrete pad for vendors including an electrical hook-up. Explore a canopy or cover for the space.
- Stage & Performance System: Must Have-stage with electrical hook-up, Desired-stage with acoustic, lighting, and electricity features.

**Security and Maintenance**

- Site Security/Lighting: Must Have-parking and pathway lighting.
- Facility Security: Not Needed-explore a modest manual lock system for stage area.
- Site Maintenance Plan: Must Have-basic grounds maintenance including lawn mowing, trash service, and snow removal.

**Management**

- Reservation/Programming Personnel (Daily Operations): Must Have-seasonal part-time staff.
2-DAY WORKSHOP

Partnership Planning
LHB presented three management models to the Commission for discussion. The purpose was to gain consensus from the group on what model would make sense for the long-term viability and ongoing operation of an outdoor performance venue.

Public
A government entity or department responsible for operation, maintenance and management. Funds generated generally are funneled back into site maintenance, operation, and site improvements. This generally means the management is run through a city department like a parks department.

Private
Private business, company or entity providing services to the community with the ability to derive direct financial benefit from management, operation, and promotion of a site. Management could be run by a restaurant or brewery, a performing company or a foundation.

“Friends” Group / Conservancy*
Generally, a smaller, primarily volunteer-led organization or entity responsible for space management and stewardship. Any financial benefit derived from activities on site generally go back to organization for operational expenses.

*A fourth partnership model emerged through conversation, privately-owned public space. This model will be discussed in the recommendations section of the document.
2-DAY WORKSHOP

Right-Size Activity
Day 2 of the Workshop explored site scale, site constraints and site construction challenges through an exercise using scaled site features on aerial maps. Participants were asked to lay out the desired features, as identified in the survey and at community meetings, in a pattern that best suited the goals of the project. Site elements included:

- Stage
- Concession Area
- Restroom Facilities
- Parking
- Formal Seating
- Lawn Seating

The exercise, “Right-Size,” explored site capacity and venue placement at both the Forest History Center and Northern Community Radio sites. The exercise challenged the groups to balance priorities, understand site challenges and benefits, and work collaboratively to identify desired alignment of Commission, City, and potential partner goals.

Key Take-Aways

Forest History Center
- Parking is plentiful.
- Capacity to host large events.
- Dovetails with Minnesota Historical Society’s future planned programming at the Forest History Center.
- Would require additional infrastructural investments.

Northern Community Radio
- Location is already established as a gathering space in Grand Rapids.
- Potential for two alternative stage locations.
- Can accommodate new investments for restroom and concession facilities.
- Parking and traffic management would require additional coordination.
PUBLIC MEETING #2

April 4, 2017

The Public Open House was organized in a "round-robin" style with modules for interactive participation. Participants broke into two groups to participate in programming, partnership and design exercises.

Calendar of Events

The activity at Station 1 was to develop a calendar of events, utilizing a large format print, pictured to the right. LHB staff solicited input on events that could be hosted at an outdoor performance venue. The group provided both existing annual happenings as well as imagined or future planned events.

Key considerations discussed by the groups included factoring in the seasonal restrictions of an outdoor venue, the venue's scale, the size of the events and site's capacity, the need for parking and other considerations. Events ranged from public large scale festivals to small religious ceremonies. To the right, is a list of some of the identified events:

**Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Judy Garland Festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotary Gavel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamber Fishing Opener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi Riverfest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forest Jam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tall Timber Days</td>
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<tr>
<td>Green Cheese Annual Picnic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Praise 10 Concert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October Fest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare-In-The-Park</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planned Events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Library concerts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YMCA health and fitness events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bike tune-up/rides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddle board rental</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art fair</td>
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<tr>
<td>4th of July festivities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kayak and canoe festival</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farmer's Market</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art programming for kids</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community education events</td>
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<tr>
<td>4-H competitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center Stage Thursdays</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wedding/Religious events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Friday Art Walk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wine on the river</td>
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<tr>
<td>Naturalist programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental education</td>
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<tr>
<td>History and culture conversations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Halloween festival</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hunting festival</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter Ice Sculpture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skating Rink</td>
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<tr>
<td>Festival of lights</td>
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PUBLIC MEETING #2

April 4, 2017

Station 2 functioned to provide an overview of a range of architectural features, finishes and canopy types. LHB provided the group with visual aids demonstrating stage scales and comparisons against local stages in Grand Rapids. A second activity challenged the group to prioritize amenities and desired features at an outdoor performance venue using a selection of 36 different images formatted as small cards.

Architectural Priorities
- Desire for backstage space.
- Desire for wing space, does not need to be permanent.
- Stage size can be smaller than 40’ x 60’.
- A blend of stationary seating and lawn seating is desired.
- ADA accessibility is crucial.
- Desire to provide quality theatrical technology.
- Desire to cover stage.
- Varying interest in protecting the audience with a cover from weather.
- “Simplicity over complexity” as a guiding principle.

Amenity and Feature Desires
- Restrooms, preference for flushing toilets.
- Play space for families and children.
- Concessions, a concrete pad with electricity was identified to be acceptable.
- Landscaped pathways
- A combination of movable and stationary seating desired.
RECOMMENDATIONS

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SITE SELECTION

Both the Forest History Center and the Northern Community Radio site have enormous potential for hosting a new riverfront venue, yet a preferred site did not emerge during the 2-day workshop. After further site evaluation and comparison by the consultant team, however, one site slowly rose to the top when continually measured against the project’s goals, objectives, and guiding principles.

Northern Community Radio

We recommend moving forward with the Northern Community Radio site for further site investigation and design exploration.

The Northern Community Radio site offers the greatest opportunity to strengthen the community’s relationship with the river while also allowing for revitalization, town connectivity and economic growth to occur in the most flexible and dynamic ways.

Specifically, site features that can be built upon include:

- Already established as a community gathering space.
- Ability to reuse/reposition existing rotary tent.
- Has better potential for an enhanced level of foot-traffic and “drop-ins.”
- Proximity to radio station would make broadcasting events easier.
- Proximity to Downtown is a primary benefit.
- Adjacent uses, like YMCA and library are synergistic.
- Connection with river is more intimate.
- Potential increase in partnership opportunities and attendance due to future hotel development.
- Parking overflow can be consumed by existing downtown district.
- Water and utilities are more easily accessible.
- Site is currently maintained by a combination of City staff and Library staff.
- Site is well known as an existing performance site.
- Proposed pedestrian bridge provides additional connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods and other community organizations/assets.
- Stage could potentially be positioned in the backwater of the site, allowing for venue experience to occur from the water (by boat), while paying homage to original Showboat Landing site.
This site plan represents the collaborative efforts of Group 1 stakeholders.

Key themes and design suggestions include:

- The stage cantilevers out over the water, similar to the original Showboat Landing stage.
- The backdrop behind the stage not only features the picturesque river, but also the proposed pedestrian bridge.
- Seating is a combination of 275 designated spaces near the front of the stage, with informal lawn seating on the hill behind. The existing paved trail intersects the two areas, providing for clear circulation and better definition.
- A new restroom facility is situated at the terminus of NE 3rd Ave and NW 2nd Street.
- A shared concession area, equipped with concrete surfacing and electrical hook-ups, is strategically placed along the roadway to service multiple users/events.
- Additional parking for 175 spaces are located as infill lots within the adjacent 4 block area. Assumes patrons are willing to walk .25 mile to the site and/or use alternative modes of transportation (bike, bus, walk).

This site plan represents the collaborative efforts of Group 1 stakeholders.
Perspective View 1

Covered stage, seating area, and trail with pedestrian bridge illustrated in the background.
CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN-OPTION 2

This site plan represents the collaborative efforts of Group 2 stakeholders.

Key themes and design suggestions include:

- Includes 2 stages, a primary and secondary performance area for multi-show events. Secondary stage could be a temporary structure if library chooses to expand.
- Primary stage is in the same general location as existing tent near Radio station, but provides more open views to the river with 500 designated/tiered seats surrounding the central stage.
- The secondary stage is located to the west of the Library with informal lawn seating, and may be used for more intimate shows, community education, and/or children's programming.
- A modest restroom facility could be placed centrally located along the trail between the 2 stages, and/or in a more discreet location near the bridge access.
- A seasonal equipment shed could also be placed centrally on the site allowing for bike, kayak/canoe, ski and snowshoe rentals to occur.
- A shared concession area, equipped with concrete surfacing and electrical hook-ups, is strategically placed along the roadway to service multiple users/events.
- Additional parking for 175 spaces are located off-site but within a reasonable walking distance of the site. There is also potential for shared parking across NW 2nd street if agreed upon by future hotel developer.
Perspective View 2

Winter along river trail with secondary stage in the background.
ARCHITECTURAL PRIORITIES

Preliminary Design Considerations
An open stage allowing uninterrupted views to the river.

**SPATIAL COMPARISON**

The stage area is to be forty feet by forty feet as a basis for a formal design process. The size will allow for flexibility in programming local and touring productions of varying types.

The venue must be designed to accommodate technical theatrical equipment of a professional caliber. While the extent of venue-owned equipment will be determined in the future, simple audio and basic stage lighting systems will allow for impromptu use by a larger portion of the community.

A. **“Typical” Theatrical Stage Area**
   40’ X 40’ (Recommended)

B. **Rotary Tent @ KAXE Stage Area**
   40’ X 60’

C. **Reif Main Stage Area**
   48’ X 35’ (53’ to front of apron) 13’ and 16’ Wings to SL and SR

The stage will have a roof to protect from mild weather. That roof may extend over a portion of the audience in a manner similar to how the Rotary tent at KAXE can shelter an area in front of a stage. Regardless of the specific strategy, a formal design process will address the need for a covered area beyond the stage. Such an area may or may not be directly over a portion of the audience seating area, and may or may not be a permanent piece of infrastructure.

Specific material and aesthetic considerations have yet to be formally addressed.
ARCHITECTURAL PRIORITIES

**STAGE ROOF**
Potential for extension over a portion of the audience.

**OPEN, RAISED STAGE**
Views beyond to river, pedestrian bridge, etc.

**STAGE**
A simple, open, and raised stage with roof covering and views all around. Must accommodate theatrical audio, lighting, and projection equipment. Individual performances to accommodate “backstage” needs with temporary means, but designing for that eventuality will help.

**FORMAL SEATING AREA**
(200-300 seats)

**OPEN LAWN SEATING**
(Venue to reach capacity for plus or minus 500)
SITE EXPERIENCE
The quality and character of a public space have a significant impact on its success

Characteristics identified by the community include those identified below. These features illustrate attributes the community would expect of an outdoor performance venue.
SITE ELEMENTS

Landscape Features
The landscape and planting selection should tell a story. Plants can be selected for their beauty, functional benefit to an ecosystem, or their textural qualities. Plants should match the character of a site while adding quality and improve the aesthetic appeal of place.

Plantings have the ability to orient visitors to their surroundings and provide a backdrop for performances.

Shade and Screening
Shade trees are flexible features effectively blocking harsh summer sunlight, minimizing heat loads, while transforming in the winter allowing light to warm the surface. Consider using evergreens to screen unattractive views to the north and/or as a wind break. Trees are also effective at absorbing noise as well as reducing glare.

Shade and Screening

Softening and Beautification
Select a planting palette that includes natives and low maintenance species with varying bloom times and textures. Recommended species include; shrub rose, bush honeysuckle, coneflowers, sedums, salvias, daylily, and a mix of ornamental grasses like prairie dropseed and feather reed grass. A well-designed planting scheme will define the space, provide a sense of intimacy, relaxation and well-being.
SITE ELEMENTS

Site Furnishings
Site Furnishings have the ability to add character and artistry to a site. Site furnishings should be functional, easily maintainable and fit the unique characteristics of the site. Furnishings contribute to safety, beauty and a sense of enhanced quality of a site. Site furnishings should be welcoming and comfortable.

Furnishing
The style and materials for benches, tables, trash receptacles, bike racks and signage should be aesthetically in line with other site, yet stand out so the space is unique and easily identifiable. Dark and more natural colors, such as black or bronze, fade nicely into the landscape and don’t show dirt or wear as much as lighter furnishings.

Lighting
Selecting additional site lighting fixtures that match the current lightpoles in color and style will strengthen the sense of place. Bollard or integral pavement lighting are unique styles to consider for elegant pathway lighting, however they can sometimes be more expensive. Simple and classic designs are recommended as they are timeless providing flexibility with future changes.
SITE ELEMENTS

Surfaces and Pathways
The paths leading to an Outdoor Performance Venue should be easily navigable from parking areas. Additionally, surfaces should be accessible and even, enabling a range of individual’s equal access to the site. Pathways should remain free and clear of obstructions, and be of a dimension wide enough to allow service vehicles access to the stage and any additional amenity structures.

Poured
Bituminous (blacktop) or concrete are affordable and easily maintainable materials for pathways. A variety of surface treatments can be applied to concrete, adding visual interest and texture to the pathway. Poured surfaces provide for more durability, and easier mobility for strollers, bikes, and wheelchairs.

Pavers
Installing a unique paver for a portion of the trail system or for a small plaza space can add character to the design. Pavers come in a variety of shapes and colors, and can even be designed to infiltrate stormwater. Though often more expensive, this option is well received by regulatory or municipal entities as there are great sustainability benefits associated with this best practice.
Operations and Facility Management Recommendations

For the outdoor venue to be successful and self-sustaining in years to come, an operational, management and maintenance plan will need to be fully developed prior to the opening of the venue.

Based on stakeholder input, the site Must Haves comprise of:

- A restroom facility.
- Modest site furnishings, designated and informal lawn seating.
- Parking accommodation for a minimum of 50 spaces.
- A concrete pad with electrical plug-ins for vendors.
- A covered stage with electrical system.
- Pathway lighting.
- Basic grounds maintenance for lawn mowing, snow and trash removal.

Significant effort will be necessary to ensure these facilities have continuing programming, are operating appropriately and are maintained on a daily, monthly and yearly basis. We heard from stakeholders that it may be too great a feat for just one entity to take on these responsibilities given current capacity and staffing. And we agree. Efforts to run and manage the outdoor venue space should be a shared commitment, resulting in stronger community ownership and creative programming. For these reasons, we recommend implementing a Privately-Owned Public Space (POPS) partnership model.

What is a Privately Owned Public Space (POPS)?

POPS originated in New York City as part of a zoning incentive encouraging private developers to provide spaces for the public inside or outside their buildings in exchange for greater density.

This incentive model is now active in multiple cities worldwide and commonly include plazas, small parks, and atriums.

Revenue Generation

With the implementation of the POPS model, our team recommends

Generating revenue to put back into the long-term maintenance and operations of the site which will be essential to the sustainability of the Venue.

Sources of Revenue include:

- Concessions Agreements/Permitting.
- Stage rental.
- Permit & application fees.
- Annual fundraising campaigns.
- Donations and grants.

Revenue generated through these activities should go directly to the primary provider, recommended here as Northern Community Radio. This is to ensure operational, staffing and management expenses are covered.

What does it take to run a venue?

- Finances
- Booking
- Sales of Tickets
- Maintenance
- Marketing
- Traffic Management and Circulation
- Permits
- Concession Coordination
- Technology Operation
- Sanitation/ Clean-up
- Ongoing Programming/Annual programming
- Public Safety and Security
- Volunteer Coordination
Operations and Facility Management Recommendations

The recommendations below illustrate a preliminary framework for long term operations of an outdoor performance venue, however, it is important to acknowledge that significant coordination will need to continue to establish formal expectations and roles of each partner.

### Primary Provider Responsibilities

**Northern Community Radio**

- Continue to host & expand summer concert series.
- Designate 1/2 programming staff to focus on recruitment of entertainment performances & manage calendar scheduling.
- Manage liability & take care of property ownership issues.
- Handle booking/rental and fee collection.
- Host quarterly development meetings with stakeholders to develop calendars, review annual budget and develop ongoing support measures.

### Municipal Responsibilities

**City of Grand Rapids and Arts and Culture Commission**

- City Public Works: Seasonal grounds maintenance (mowing, snow & trash removal).
- City Parks: Community programming and educational events.
- City Parks: Forestry management and landscape advisement.
- City Public Works: Traffic management, site safety, and signage.
- Arts and Culture Commission: Provide additional capacity and support as needed, continued support, guidance and participation in venue development and planning.

### Private Partner Responsibilities

**Reif Center for Performing Arts (or other non-profit partner)**

- Provide recommendations for long-term care of performance system & stage (acoustic & lighting system) equipment.
- Provide mentorship and recommendations for programming, artist management, venue operations and marketing.
- Designate ¼ staff, using in-place departmental resources, assist in marketing and advertisement.

### Players

**Northern Community Radio**

- Director
- Manager
- Staff

**City of Grand Rapids and Arts and Culture Commission**

- City Public Works
- City Parks
- Arts and Culture Commission

**Reif Center for Performing Arts (or other non-profit partner)**

- MacRostie
- Grand Rapids Area Library
- Grand Rapids Arts

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Photo Credit- Angie Ulseth
Photo Credit- City of Grand Rapids
Photo Credit- Visit Grand Rapids

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Outdoor Performance Venue Feasibility Study
City of Grand Rapids Arts and Culture Commission

June 2017
Phasing Plan

**Priorities for implementation include:**
Establishing an effective timeline to guide community expectations and organize funding campaigns for capital build-out. A three phase strategy is recommended for project implementation.

Phase 1 is intended to focus on continued coordination, establishing project expectations, seeking funding opportunities and continued evaluation of site conditions.

Phase 2 is focused on the development of operational conditions and relationships to ensure successful execution of the project. This includes agreement development and programming and planning.

Phase 3 is the construction stage. Finalization of agreements, design is approved and construction is executed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Phase 1 (1-2 Years)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Phase 2 (2-5 Years)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Phase 3 (5 Years+)</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Coordinate with City for potential State Bonding request.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Develop operating budget forecast.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Continue coordination with pedestrian bridge development and hotel development.</td>
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<td>- Form Development committee to guide Design phase of project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Execute survey and flood plain analysis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Develop parking agreements with the City, Grand Rapids Area Library, Northern Community Radio and Blandin Foundation.</td>
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<td>- Hire design consultant.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Begin season planning for events with Development Committee.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Develop POPS agreement between City/Northern Community Radio and Arts and Culture Commission.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Establish online rental/permitting process for venue leasing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Design Development of stage, auxiliary buildings and surrounding landscape.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Maintenance and Operation Plan Development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Construction of Stage.</td>
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<td>- Path implementation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Wayfinding and Signage installation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Maintenance and Operations agreement development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Site Grading.</td>
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PROJECT BUDGET PARAMETERS

To begin working on next steps

For funding and potential partnership agreements, having a better understanding of the overall project budget is necessary. Below is a professional opinion of cost that can be used to assist with planning and decision-making regarding future development for an outdoor venue site.

The estimated costs provided are based on pre-design project information generated during the workshop sessions and could vary extensively depending on details that will be considered as part of the final design process.

This opinion of probable costs has been prepared based on our team’s experience, qualifications, knowledge of the site and understanding of the project.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT START-UP &amp; ASSOCIATED SOFT COSTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Entitlements/Land-Use Agreements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Site Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geotechnical Investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Regulations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Permitting &amp; Miscellaneous Fees</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>SITE DEVELOPMENT COSTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitework (includes mobilization, removals, site prep/erosion control, earthwork &amp; grading)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stormwater Management (assumes above ground storm ponds with inlet/outlet and piping - on-site)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidewalk Improvements/Trail Extension (assumes ADA accessibility, concrete, blacktop or gravel material)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking Lot &amp; Entry Drive (assumes blacktop pavement, subbase and curb &amp; gutter, assumes 75-100 spaces)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Site Lighting (includes parking lot and pathway lighting)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utility Extension/Connections (includes parking lot and pathway lighting)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toilet Facility (includes parking lot and pathway lighting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage (includes roof structure &amp; foundation, &amp; performance system set-up)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Furnishings (includes trash receptacles, benches, bike racks, &amp; picnic tables, does not include stage seating area)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signage (includes entrance, directional wayfinding, &amp; informational kiosk)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Landscaping (includes trees, shrubs and turf establishment)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTINGENCY &amp; DESIGN COSTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional A/E Design Services (assumes 10% of estimate construction value)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bidding Assistance &amp; Construction Admin./Site Observation (assumes 7% of estimate construction value)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Construction Contingency (assumes 20% of estimate construction value to cover unforeseen circumstances)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
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**TOTAL PROJECT COSTS**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>$1,613,850.00</strong></td>
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*Numbers are based on current costs (2017), inflation rate should be applied as necessary.*