

Artists pitch sculptures for plaza outside Madison Children's Museum

GAYLE WORLAND | gworland@madison.com | 608-252-6188 | Posted: Wednesday, October 26, 2011 7:00 am

There's plenty of fun and inventiveness inside the Madison Children's Museum, but the plaza outside could use a little more personality.

That's the thought of four artists whose work is under consideration for a \$100,000 public art project at the corner of North Pinckney and North Hamilton streets.

The tiny pie-shaped area, known as Rotary Centennial Plaza and hemmed in by heavily used sidewalks, "is one of the most prominent locations in our city," said Karin Wolf, arts program administrator for the city of Madison.

"To me it was important not only that (a public sculpture) speak to the whimsy and playfulness of the children's museum, but that it speaks to all audiences," she said. "There's a (YWCA) there, and a restaurant evening crowd, a workday crowd — so it really has to hold the attention of all the users of that space."



So [the public is being asked to weigh in](#) on the four design proposals by noon Thursday. A selection committee meets later that evening to choose an artist for the project, which is scheduled for a June 2013 unveiling to coincide with the 100th anniversary of Madison's Rotary Club. The City Council must approve the artist selection once fundraising is complete.

Proposals range from a glass mosaic tower based on Dane County Indian burial mounds to kinetic posts made from antique light poles. The four finalists are David Boyer of Reno, Nev.; David Dahlquist of Des Moines, Iowa; Aris Georgiades and Gail Simpson of Stoughton; and Aaron Stephan of Portland, Maine.

Design limitations were many: The area serves five corners, drops down a hill, and is a complex intersection of buildings, street lights and traffic lights. Concerns about sculptures that would drip water, creating icy sheets on winter sidewalks, had to be addressed.

The Madison Children's Museum has applied for a \$30,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts for the project; the Madison Arts Commission has set aside \$25,000 and the Rotary Club is expected to help with the rest of the estimated \$100,000 cost, said children's museum executive director and Rotary Club member Ruth Shelly.

The idea of a plaza dedicated to the Rotary Club goes back to 2007, three years before the opening of the new children's museum, she said. Around \$250,000 in city TIF funds set to expire was used to install new paving, benches, plantings and a stage at the site, she said.

"The one piece that was never completed is a major piece of public art," Shelly said.

With each of the concepts under consideration, "I believe that you will see the artwork before you see the children's museum, and that was our hope — that if you're coming from a distance, it will serve as a beacon, an icon, a landmark for people to gather and to orient by."