

Public art project next to Children's Museum revived

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There's new life for a public art project adjacent to the Madison Children's Museum.

On Tuesday a resolution was introduced to the City Council to hire Portland, Maine, artist Aaron Stephan for the project after it was announced that the museum would receive a \$15,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Pending city approval, Stephan will head a design team to complete an unfinished stage on Rotary Centennial Plaza, adjacent to the site originally proposed for a sculpture by Stephan.

Stephan was chosen by a selection committee for a sculpture design he submitted last year, but a lack of consensus among committee members and the public spurred concerns over whether to proceed with it.

Karin Wolf, arts program administrator for Madison, said the committee received lots of public feedback after a State Journal article featured the four finalists last October. But the feedback, she said, revealed mixed opinions on the sculptures.

"What it sort of showed is there was the same kind of ratio favoring each proposal in the public's eye," Wolf said. "That means is whatever we picked, the majority of the population would already dislike."

The NEA grant, however, is smaller than the \$30,000 requested and is tied to the committee's selection of Stephan, said Ruth Shelly, executive director of the children's museum and Rotary Club member. "Clearly we didn't want to turn that money down so we had to shift our sights to a project of smaller scope," Shelly said.

As a result, Stephan is being asked to start with a blank slate.

"It's the best possible outcome in this situation since there was no consensus before," said Ald. Mike Verveer, 4th District, who represents the area surrounding the location on the corner of North Hamilton and North Pinckney streets.

The budget for the project will be significantly smaller, reduced from \$100,000 to \$75,000. Rotary Club of Madison will give the city \$35,000, and \$25,000 will come from the city's municipal art fund.