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July 24, 2008

To: State Street Oversight Committee & Madison Common Council

Re: Frances Street Plaza Fountain

The City of Madison is planning to install a water feature on the corner of Frances Street and State Street. The City has solicited proposals from artists around the country and chosen 5 finalists for selection. They are as follows:

1. Actualsize
2. Tom Askman
3. Myklebust & Sears
4. Stoller Studio
5. Howard Ben Tre

The five finalists were given a tour of the site and brief on the project in April 2008. At this tour, City Engineering provided the plans of the infrastructure, which was being installed to support the water feature during the 2008 State Street Reconstruction Project. The infrastructure included a 1" water supply line, sanitary sewer drain, and empty electric conduit to provide power.

A selection committee was populated with members from various agencies/interests throughout the City. The artists presented to the selection committee and two finalists were identified. The finalists chosen were Tom Askman first place, and Myklebust & Sears second place.

The Madison Arts Commission also reviewed the five finalists and selected two other finalists as their choice. They selected Stoller Studio & Howard Ben Tre.

The subject is being heard at the State Street Oversight Committee next on July 24, 2008 and Common Council afterward. The purpose of this memo is to document City Engineering's comments on the finalists.

The infrastructure installed during the State Street Reconstruction project supports a low-flow water fountain. The water is provided at a low flow, and after used through the fountain, water is returned to the sanitary sewer system. Three of the five finalists (Actualsize, Tom Askman & Howard Ben Tre) have proposed a recirculating system, which involves the use of pumps, filters & and a storage tank of water. The infrastructure installed on site does not include a return water line or the pumps, filters and storage tank. Typically, this type of equipment is installed underground in a vault. The site location has a number of existing underground water, sewer, gas, electric and telephone conduits, which makes finding a location for the tank and equipment problematic.


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In our experience the cost of the recirculating system is quite expensive as well. The Capitol Square fountains on East & West Washington Avenue cost the city \$250,000 at each of the four fountain sites to move utilities around and install the vault and equipment required for the fountain.

City Engineering is under the assumption that if a recirculating system is selected, the cost to install the new lines and equipment and any utility relocation will be covered with the artist's budget. As the total artist budget has been set at \$230,000, we have concerns that the current budget may prove inadequate.

Sincerely,



Larry D. Nelson, P.E.
City Engineer

LDN:cjp

cc: Ald. Michael Verveer
Christy Bachmann, City Engineering
Bill Fruhling, City Planning

City Planning Division / Urban Design Section Point of View 7/24/08

The highest priority for any public space project is to create a rich environment that promotes engagement and that can be enjoyed from many different perspectives.

When a public art piece, or fountain, becomes a part of any larger public space, it is important to make sure that the piece is well integrated into the larger context. The art piece may be a subtle part of the surroundings, or can act as a focal point for public engagement. When choosing public art, the first order of business should be to make sure that the art enhances the public engagement. People should always be the main attraction; public art should serve as a way for people to more fully enjoy public spaces.

To maintain a high level of public engagement over the course of many years, it is important to design a space, and include art that has a lasting appeal. It is essential, that art should be easy to maintain over the course of many years, so that the space continues to be an attractive and well-loved space. High levels of complexity in fountains can lead to a maintenance burden that over time defeats the original purpose and function of both the art piece and the space as a whole. Maintenance funding can too easily be deferred often leading to the slow decline of both the art and the space over time.

The City has been working on plans and reconstruction of State Street for the past several years. It is important that the final design of the Frances Street Plaza space flow from the larger design context of the streetscape, including the continued use of granite accents in all phases, as exemplified in the Philosopher's Grove. The original design concept grew out of the principles of creating a timeless, flexible, elegant and low maintenance project.

1. How does the space serve the people and a variety of potential functions from an individual level, to unplanned events, to planned events?
2. What does art piece offer to the space and to the larger project?
3. How is the water used, does it provide for an interactive potential, and how will it be maintained?.