

Grass sculpture may greet east-side travelers

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Public art project calls for 300-foot-long display along Highway 60 median

Motorists traveling on Grafton's east side may find themselves greeted by a large-scale sculpture with a grassy feel later this year.

A conceptual design for a 300-foot-long piece of art that would be displayed in the Highway 60 median between Port Washington Road and I-43, received a favorable review from the village's Public Arts Board on Jan. 22.



The project, which is being developed by students at the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design, would depict colorful greenery rising from a field.

"It's like tall blades of grass," said Village Administrator Darrell Hofland, who noted that the sculpture is designed to catch the eye of travelers entering or leaving Grafton along its busiest thoroughfares.

Preliminary plans call for the sculpture to be six feet wide and have blades seven to nine feet tall. Stones on the base of the piece would absorb light during the day and illuminate it at night.

Hofland said the sculpture would reflect a "Quality Life. Naturally." branding theme the village uses for marketing and replace an 8-foot-tall stone welcome-to-Grafton sign the village installed in the median in 2004.

Last year, Economic Development for Grafton Enhancement (EDGE) created a branding subcommittee to explore ways to create a public art project for the east-side gateway. The subcommittee has been working with a Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design professor whose students were asked to develop a conceptual design as a class assignment.

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“The subcommittee is looking for artwork that makes a statement to visitors as well as residents,” Hofland said.

The Public Arts Board has authorized subcommittee member Todd Sprenger to continue working with the students on refining the design.

Additional design work includes determining precise length and density of the sculpture and what construction materials will be used.

Plans call for the project to eventually be turned over to a professional artist who will create the sculpture. The cost of the project would be covered through the village’s room tax fund, which is used for marketing and promotion, Hofland said.

Another funding option is the tax incremental financing district that includes the nearby Grafton Commons, he added.

“The details and ultimately the cost of the sculpture have yet to be determined,” Hofland said. “The Village Board will have to sign off on the final project.”

The seven-member Public Arts Board, which is chaired by artist Erin Blum, agreed to consider incorporating elements of the sculpture art at other locations in the village. Design updates for the sculpture are expected to be reviewed by the board in March

Hofland said the east-side welcome sign is expected to be moved to another site, most likely along Highway O on the village’s north side or Highway 60 on the west side.

Image Information: A LARGE-SCALE SCULPTURE depicting blades of grass rising from a field of stones is being designed as a public art project for Grafton’s east side. Plans call for the sculpture to be placed in the Highway 60 median between Port Washington Road and I-43.