



Northfield, MN

Public Art and Creative Placemaking Opportunities

Fall 2022

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for BUILD:PUBLIC

Northfield Public Art Opportunities:

The following recommendations for public art and creative placemaking in Northfield, MN are based on the unique character of this beautiful river community. The Opportunities include a set of public art and creative placemaking typologies that offer up a way of defining these opportunities in the unique context of Northfield. The Public Art Opportunities map builds on the existing public art collection and makes recommendations on sites and typologies of public art and creative placemaking that could be integrated into the river loop to help celebrate the community and create unique spaces that represent the past, present, and future of Northfield. This map can also be considered a curation of spaces in Northfield, both existing and potential, anchored in the new infill development proposed by BUILD:PUBLIC and the Lander Group.

This document builds off the work of BUILD:PUBLIC as well as municipal planning documents like the Northfield 2020 Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan. The Riverfront Enhancement Action Plan calls for the following that are integrated into the next steps recommendations for Northfield and public art.

- 1) ESTABLISH Northfield's Cannon River Regional Park
- 2) ENHANCE and activate your riverfront parks
- 3) COMPLETE your local and regional trail system
- 4) EXPLORE Ames Mill Dam reconstruction options
- 5) PROMOTE economic development and tourist destination

Reflecting Northfield Today: Ecology, Industry, and Education

Northfield, MN is a vibrant small, college town on the Cannon River in central Minnesota. It is surrounded by an agricultural area and has roots in related industries. The town is also an academic centerpiece for the state boasting several renowned local colleges. Downtown has a unique character that is a walkable, human scale, with a historic feel. The river flows along the back door of main street, and the area is full of opportunities for deeper connections to the riverfront. The public art opportunities analysis of Northfield builds off the plans for new and enhanced connections to the river through a celebration of what is uniquely Northfield -- an intersection of ecology, industry, and education.

Public Art Typologies for Northfield

The following examples establish a set of public art opportunities that are recommended for Northfield along the river loop in downtown.

Linear and Dispersed

Along the riverwalk, there is ample opportunity for enhanced placemaking, both to draw people from main street to the river, to guide river users to downtown, and to engage with the river along the walk.



Superkilen, Copenhagen, Denmark: <https://www.publicspace.org/works/-/project/g057-superkilen>

Confetti Urbanism: <https://endemicarchitecture.com/Confetti-Urbanism>

Gateway, Wayfinding and Traffic Calming

Art can play a powerful role in wayfinding or helping direct visitors to key locations. Wayfinding can help people find their way, but can also be a tool for creating a connected sense of identity in a place like Northfield with an array of smaller, unique gathering spaces, stores, and community resources. This is especially helpful in a college town, where the transient population is a constant with families and students coming and going over the course of 4 year terms. Wayfinding or other sculptural elements can also create gateways at key transition points into downtown.



St Paul Public Works

Worcester Wayfinding

Lang Bauman: <https://www.yatzer.com/street-paintings-lang-baumann>

Interactive

Interactive art offers a great option for Northfield to draw users to specific spaces and to activate that space, through sound, movement, and creative exploration of the user. With such an industrious culture, Northfield spaces should reflect and inspire innovation and curiosity.



Daily Tous Les Jours: <https://www.dailytouslesjours.com/en/work>

Rest and Regeneration as Ecology

The river can be a source of regeneration for people and wildlife alike. How can art play a role in the enhancement of this important function of river life? Humans, animals, and plants all play a critical role in ecological systems and art can celebrate, enhance, and educate on these fronts.



Geometric Benches: <https://www.boredart.com/2019/07/unboring-park-bench-designs-which-are-extraordinary.html>
Pollinator Garden, Christine Baumeler, Fargo, ND

Historical Contemporary

Northfield has classic historic feel and walkable scale with a warm variety of architectural styles. Artworks in town should reflect the historical character but also celebrate the future facing culture of the town as a heart of education and industry. Europe offers an array of examples where whimsy and innovation collide with legacy in the built environment that could offer an inspiration to Northfield.



Geometric Benches: <https://www.boredart.com/2019/07/unboring-park-bench-designs-which-are-extraordinary.html>

Basel, Switzerland: Jonathan Borofsky: Hammering Man

Integration with Infrastructure

Bridges, retaining walls, and other infrastructure is an integrated approach to introducing art into space. It is a method to shift the idea of art as an object without context or purpose. It is a way to bring beauty to the every day. Crossings of the river and grade changes between main street and the river offer ample opportunity in Northfield for creative infrastructural details.



35-W Bridge by Seitu Jones: <https://www2.minneapolis.gov/business-services/planning-zoning/city-plans/public-art-long-range-planning/artist-designed-railing/>
Retaining Wall (link)

Drift Bridge: <https://alkanoglu.com/Drift>

Light and Scale

Light is an element that can bring life and safety to public space in the late afternoon and evening hours. Light fixtures can be artistic in and of themselves, and art pieces can also play with light. It is also important to work with large scales in public space so the art actually impacts the human experience in the space in an integrated way.



James Brenner, Centerpiece: <https://www.jamesbrenner.com/commissions-1>
Vertical and scale (link or name)
Cosmos: <https://www.futureforms.us/cosmos>

Temporal

Temporary art works are a creative and lower cost way to activate public space for a night or a season. From decorative plantings, to artist and community design cultural light fixtures to rotating gallery spaces, ephemeral art is an exciting realm for public art. This would be a great fit for Northfield's more traditional public spaces and parks and a way to establish less formal spaces as beloved places.



Lantern Stories, Boston, MA
Harmon Guest House, Healdsburg, CA Gallery



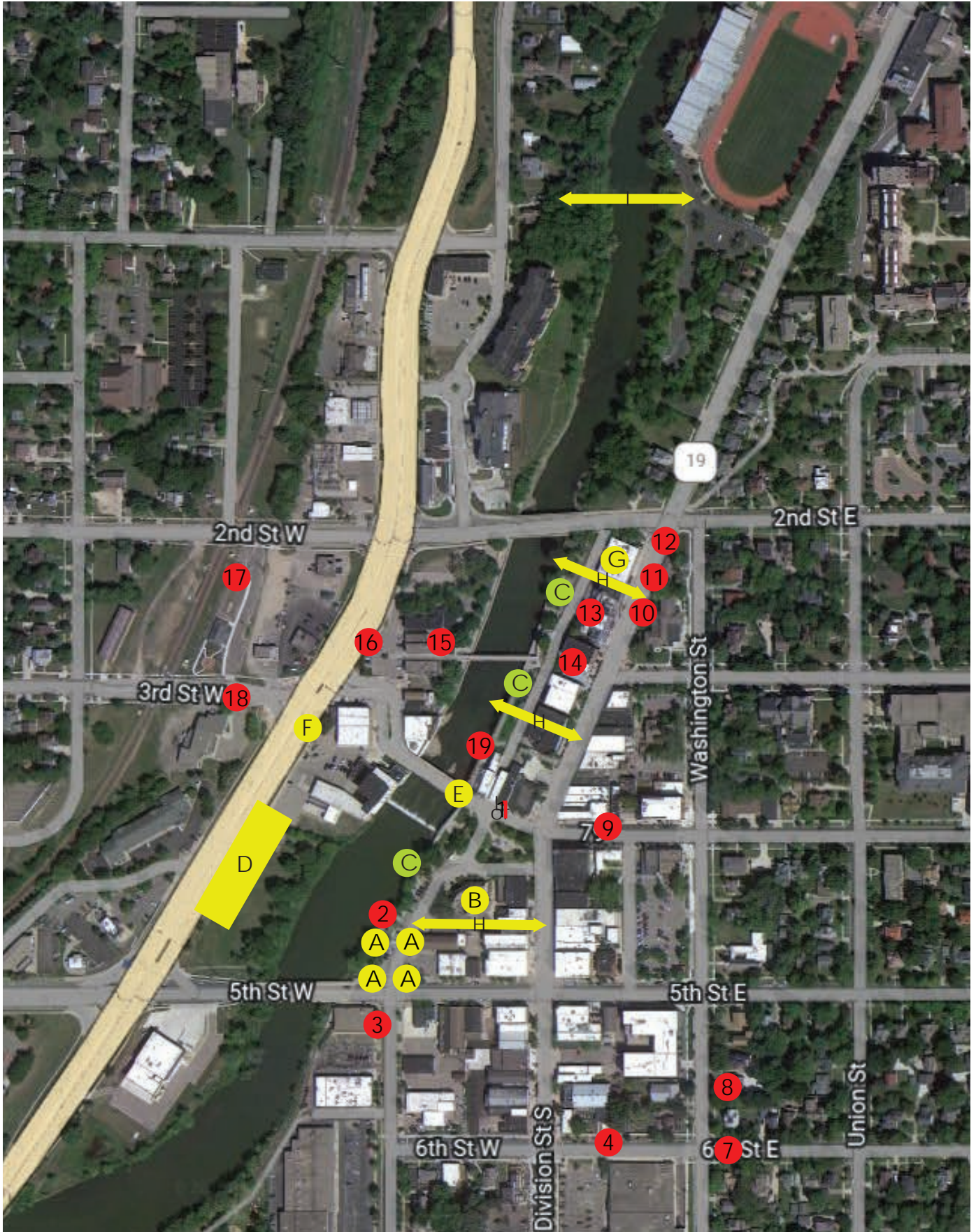
Event-based Arts and Culture

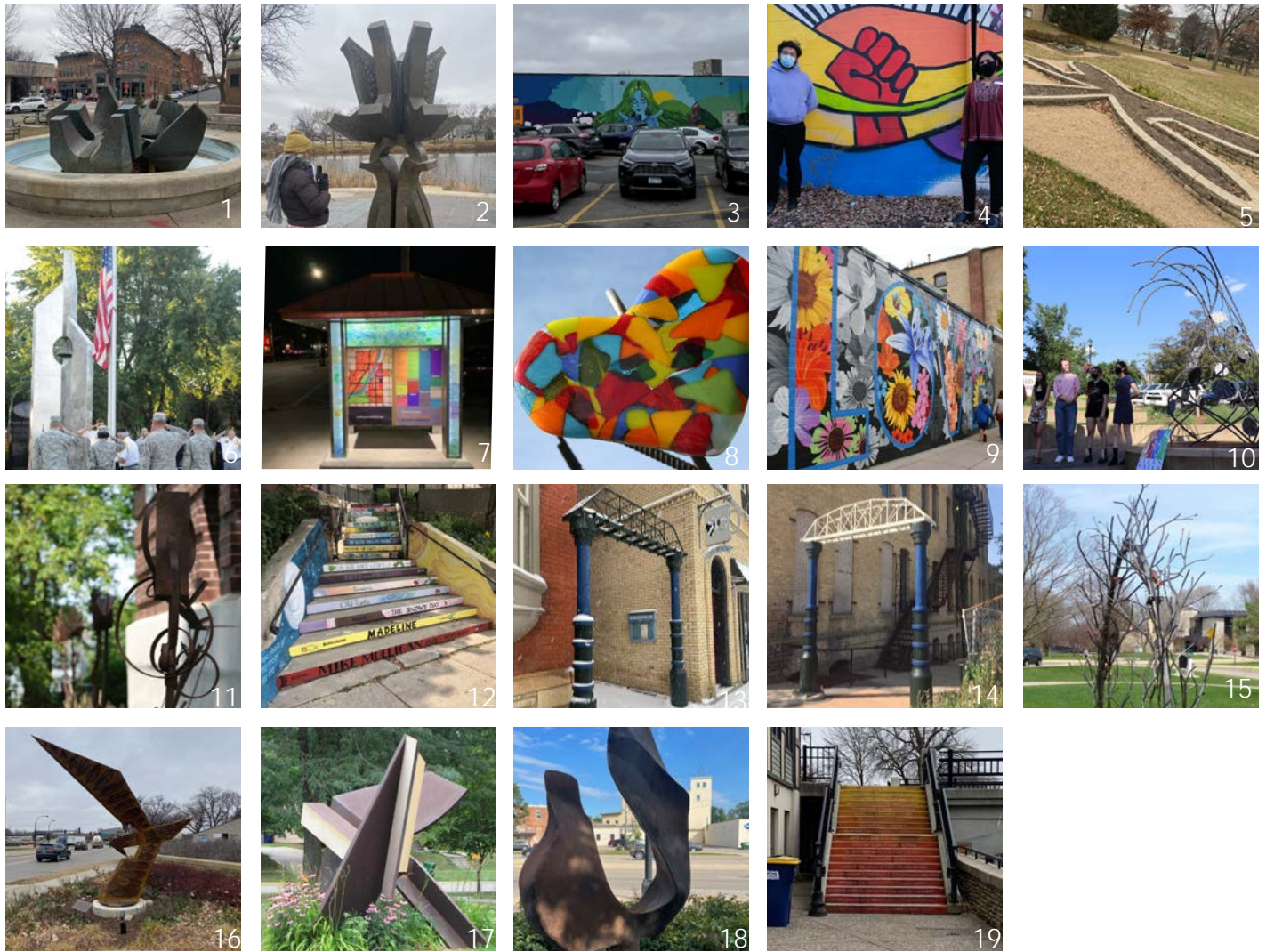
There are currently weekly and annual events held in downtown Northfield and Market Square from music festivals to farmers' markets. Building off the current line up of community events, public spaces should be designed to accommodate a range of events including outdoor classroom and seating spaces for local students to electricity plug ins for large festivals.



Northern Spark: <https://2022.northernspark.org/press-media/photo-video/>
Exhibit Columbus: <https://www.exhibitcolumbus.org/>

EXISTING AND PROPOSED PUBLIC ART IN NORTHFIELD



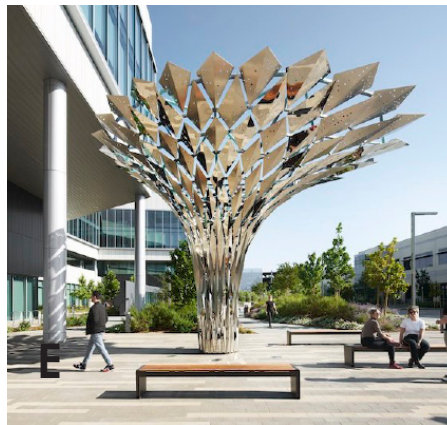


EXISTING PUBLIC ART IN NORTHFIELD (red)

- 1. Anniversary Fountain, Sculpture, Raymond Jacobson, 1980 and Civil War Monument, Sculpture, 1921
- 2. Harvest, Sculpture, Raymond Jacobson, 2005
- 3. Just Food Mural, Rafael Estrella and Student Artists, 2021
- 4. Key Mural, Members of the Key
- 5. Riverside Lions Park, Garden Club Installation
- 6. Northfield Area Veterans Memorial, Sculpture, Jeff Anderson, 2005.
- 7. Art Information Kiosk, Sculpture, Rick Swearer and Howie Holt, 2019
- 8. Spreading the Love, Sculpture, Dale Lewis and GERALYN Thelan, 2020
- 9. Love, Mural, Brett Witacre, 2019
- 10. Young Sculptors Project (YSP), 2021

- 11. Bookhead Dancers, Sculpture, Jen Wolcott, 2008
- 12. Literary Stairs, Mural, Kathy Ness and Kate Woodstrup, 2021
- 13. 2nd Street Bridge, Sculpture, Spencer Jones and Wade Kolbe, 2007
- 14. 5th Street Bridge Sculpture, Sculpture, Spencer Jones and Wade Kolbe, 2007
- 15. Threshold, Sculpture, Kris Swanson, 2018
- 16. Wanbil Mitakue Oyasin/We are all Related, Sculpture, John Sterner, 2022
- 17. Wind Piece, Sculpture, John Maakestad
- 18. AND Tree, Sculpture, by Nick Swearer, 1970
- 19. Flame, Sculpture, Nick Swearer, 1970
- 19. Poetry Steps, Mural Collective effort, 2021

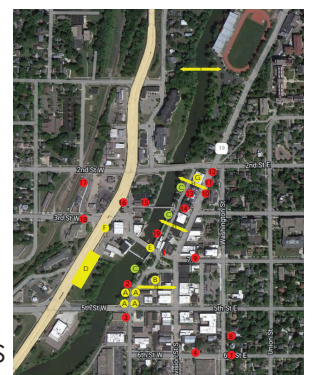
Public Art Opportunities

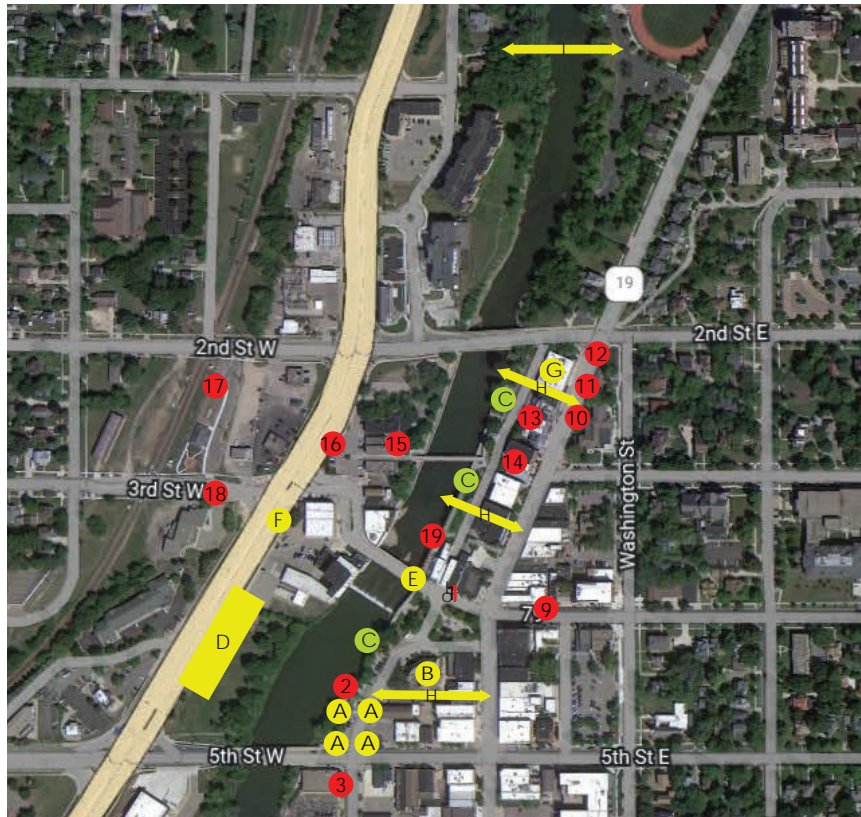


Public Art Opportunities in Northfield (yellow)

- A. Gateway, Traffic Calming and Wayfinding
- B. Infrastructural
- C. Linear and Dispersed
- D. Rest and Regeneration as Ecology
- E. Light and Scale
- F. Historical Contemporary
- G. Interactive and Temporal
- H. Traffic Calming and Wayfinding
- I. Infrastructural
- Throughout: Events-based

See map for locations





- A. Gateway, Traffic Calming and Wayfinding:** This point in Northfield represents a major gateway to downtown and transition from one side of the river to another. It is a wide right of way and could benefit from traffic calming measures, wayfinding and gateway elements to introduce downtown and encourage drivers to slow down in the zone. The pieces at this juncture could also incorporate ideas of scale and light to have a dramatic presence.
- B. Infrastructural:** The interesting grade changes at this site offer an opportunity to integrate artistic elements into the retaining walls and transitions between built environment and the river.
- C. Linear and Dispersed:** Along the river walk, it is suggested to build off current creative interventions with unified materiality and creative interpretation of the river.
- D. Rest and Regeneration as Ecology:** This wide open space hosts events and is an important civic space, but there is opportunity here for creating passive and artful ways to interact with the space less formally when it is not being programmed. There are also opportunities here and along both banks of the river to incorporate ecological function into art.
- E. Light and Scale:** There is an opportunity to enhance Northfield's current riverfront art collection with larger scale pieces and light. These elements would establish a sense of place as one enters downtown. The current art collection scattered along the river's edge has a consistent scale and size, and the collection could benefit from a large scale or electrified addition. There should be thought given to the types of lights used by the river and on roadways so that they do not cause distraction to drivers or harm to wildlife.
- F. Historical Contemporary:** The parking lot and commercial node in this area are charming, but lack an edge. The character, like other parts of downtown, have a unique historical and human scale. Art could help transition to the character and create an edge in this transitional geography.
- G. Interactive and Temporal:** There are opportunities within the new development sites of downtown to activate spaces in interactive and temporal ways to draw users to the new spaces and create a variety of experiences for visitors. Interactive art would be an especially great fit throughout Northfield, building on the strong culture of education and learning in town.
- H. Traffic Calming and Wayfinding:** Bright, written, visual cues are recommended to connect users between downtown and the river.
- I. Infrastructural:** A new bridge crossing is a great opportunity to integrate art into infrastructure. This is an opportunity for artists to work with engineers in the design and fabrication process.

Next Steps

This Opportunity plan is intended to provide a framework for incremental growth and evolution of the public art collection of downtown Northfield. It is intended to be implemented over several years and developments or projects. Building of the vision and implementation framework of BUILD:PUBLIC and the Lander Group, the following next steps are proposed for integration of public art and creative placemaking into the upcoming projects and near-term development in Northfield to enhance connections between community and the river, to foster spaces for belonging and exploration, and to further the activation of downtown as well as the riverfront.

Step 1: Catalyst Project Implementation

Step 2: Fundraising

Step 3: Call for Artists for additional projects to integrate into downtown and riverfront

Step 4: Public art conservation plan

Step 1: Catalyst Project Implementation

In order to more deeply integrate public art into the future development and public spaces of Northfield, it is critical to work from artists from the beginning of a process in reimagining space. The Catalyst Project will provide a framework for just that and proposes a public art concept adjacent to the upcoming Lander Group developments in Northfield to showcase premier public space that centers what is uniquely Northfield at the intersection of Ecology, Industry, and Education. The Catalyst project will set the stage for all future artwork in Northfield and act as an anchor for a future facing curated public realm. There are three sites recommended for catalyst projects that should be considered in the near-term. Those sites include Market Square Park, the Promenade, and the new hotel development. Each of those sites has potential for art integration and should consider hiring an artist to work with the team.



Recommended Sites for the Catalyst Project
Concepts by BUILD:PUBLIC team members

The Catalyst Project Vision

Futures North has been designing public art that reference the ecology, histories and geology of a site that enrich visitors' appreciation and deepen their experience of the location. The collective has a successful track record in a variety of projects, including referencing the environmental history of the Upper Mississippi River for a permanent sculpture in Lowertown, St. Paul (Meander), illustrating the migration of peoples and birds through Minnesota (Lines of Flight, Human and Lines of Flight, Avian), and more. With the goal of reclaiming an overlooked area of Northfield and its history, such an approach would be invaluable for the proposed redevelopment plans. Futures North would create an anchor piece that sets a precedent for celebrating the site's diverse histories in order to invite locals and visitors to these spaces and invite new meaning and experiences.

Public art is many things-- at its best it connects people to one another, to place, to history, potential futures, and serves infrastructural needs. The existing public art of Northfield occupies a traditional subsection of the public art world-- the majority of the pieces are object-based figural sculptures, which stand in contrast to their surroundings. Because public art is a reflection of our evolving society and its expression, our definitions of public art also must evolve. Materials and methods change to reflect our contemporary culture. The process, guided by both the public and professionals, should seek out a symbiotic and generative process between artist and community.

There is great opportunity along the Cannon River's edge for the art to engage the public with the history, ecology, and geology of the area. We see potential for using data from the region to contribute to a contemporary translation of the histories and collective future of the land and the community. The project will use site data as a design driver to reveal and celebrate the diverse sets of information that have shaped and continue to shape the site.

The piece will take a distributed approach looking to projects like the Highline in New York City, Gaudi's panots in Barcelona, and creative placemaking efforts such as Endemic Architecture's Confettin Urbanism. The 'Project' could integrate with the landscape design to shape seating, walkways, lighting, and retaining walls with the ability to aggregate and create larger spaces for gathering and assembly. This approach to public art also has great potential for wayfinding through the repetition of components along and across the rivers edge. Repeating materials, forms, patterns and textures create a sense of identity and place for this important part of the city. The catalyst project can contribute to defining the development site and its connection to the river, main street, and the rest of Northfield.

The current conditions of the rivers edge are ripe with possibilities for connecting art to the ~20' grade change from Main Street to the River. Currently there are a

number of Limestone retaining walls which contain plantings and define walkways. The project will aim to make new use of these edges by incorporating plug-in points, seating, lighting, and spaces for gathering. The catalyst project will further activate and orient users to the rivers edge with community activity and bridge the gap between students, locals, and visitors to the town.

Step 2: Fundraising

While this plan lays out a framework that will be implemented over time, on a project by project scale, if any outside funding is sought, it is suggested to aim high and set an umbrella system for funding. That might happen through a percent for arts program or outside fundraising. Fundraising for public art and creative placemaking in Northfield is recommended as a collective approach rather than an incremental one. It would be strategic to consider an effort, program, or initiative that raises funds for a collection of multiple pieces by several artists which will not only have a more significant impact on the public realm, but will also open up the doors for larger funding opportunities. It is also critical to examine how the collection can build community and integrate into community development, education, and public health efforts that are ongoing in Northfield. For a rural community like Northfield, there are likely some great opportunities for public art and creative placemaking funding through an inter sectional and community building lens. Public art tells stories, helps people feel connected and welcome, educates, fosters safe and vibrant spaces that can result in more connected social fabric. With this approach in mind, we recommend applying for a grant and running a call for artists that includes a variety of pieces, stories, and perspectives, especially those that might tell the untold or unheard stories of the community and place.

Some possible funding opportunities including philanthropy and public sector grants are listed below. Funding cycles vary and typically require a year in advance to secure for a project. If applying through the City, look for grants that non-arts organizations are eligible for or consider partnering with a local arts non-profit on a grant application. Running artist calls through a non-profit can be a great way to bring support to local organizations, support artists, and build off local arts and cultural expertise. All municipal projects should work with and involve the [Arts Commission](#). There are a variety of ways that public art can be funding by municipalities including percent for arts programs for new development, and budget requests to engage artists in community engagement and public building capital projects. It is recommended to anchor funding proposals in regional visions like the Riverfront Action Plan principles that root public art in ongoing community development efforts.

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Funders to watch:

- 1) MN State Arts Board: <http://www.arts.state.mn.us/grants/>
- 2) Southeast MN Arts Council: <http://www.semac.org/>
- 3) Project for Public Spaces Community Placemaking Grants: <https://www.pps.org>
- 4) Local Foundations
- 5) St Olaf and Carlton collaborations

Step 3: Call for Artists

Once funding has been secured, it is suggested that a call for artists is issued for multiple sites, artists, and pieces. It is important to first develop a set of selection criteria for the process, and to pull from other values and principles that are central to Northfield. The themes of history, education, rural-identity, industry, and ecology are all central to community planning documents including the Comprehensive Plan, and these are guideposts for selection criteria and artist selection. The artist may be asked to have personal connections to rural identities or have experience with working in historically significant spaces, for example. When the call for artists is issued, it is important to work with local art networks like the State Arts Board, Arts Council, Springboard for the Arts, and the Arts Commission, who can outreach through social media to regional artists. While national or international talent has great potential, there is a value in focusing the call on regional artists with connections to Northfield or demonstrates a clear alignment with other selection criteria. The call should clearly state the funding amount, a site map, information about the site, insurance requirements, community engagement requirements for the process, and a materials and artist fee budget. The selection and approval process should be clearly delineated as well in the call. An artist selection panel should be formed that includes a variety of perspectives including local residents and business owners, city officials, tribal partners, arts administrators, and artists. After the new pieces are installed is a great time for holding events and to celebrate new spaces. It is recommended to hire an arts administrator to facilitate the call and work with the artists.

Step 4: Public Art Conservation Plan

It is recommended that the city develop a public facing website that provides a public art inventory of all the pieces in Northfield. Along with this, an art conservation plan should be developed for each artwork to establish annual maintenance practices as well as a lifespan and deaccession plan for each piece in the collection. Public art can be considered any artwork in public, weather they are city owned or owned by another entity. As new pieces are introduced, an art conservation plan should be developed to ensure that artworks are preserved in accordance with the artist and art conservator best practices.