

For Immediate Release

Culligan Plaza Update

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The ad hoc committee of various city officials and potential donors concerning the Culligan Plaza infrastructure upgrades and revamp met August 15th to discuss feedback on the initial conceptual proposal following City Council's approval to proceed with planning and subsequent public feedback to the initial concept for Culligan Plaza.

Context and Background

The Culligan Plaza property was purchased by the City of Alpena in 1978 from the Richards family for \$165,000. The Culligan Building, located on the site at the time of purchase, was demolished in 1979. The plaza was last revamped in the early 1980s with assistance from the Alpena Downtown Development Corporation who raised over \$25,000 for the renovation. The plaza was named Culligan Plaza in memory of Patrick Culligan. Culligan Plaza sits at the center of Alpena as a popular meeting place and an iconic reference point for residents and visitors. It's about as close to a town square as Alpena has, a fitting context for an issue of such public interest and civic concern.

Today, Culligan Plaza is in desperate need of an update due to failing infrastructure and lack of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility. The renovation of the fountain at Culligan Plaza first appeared in the City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) in 2009 with a transition to a full renovation in the CIP in 2018. City tax dollars tentatively earmarked for the plaza redevelopment are focused on upgrading the water fountain infrastructure which needs repair based upon failing pipes and leaks in the fountain area. Additional plans include overdue upgrades to the plaza footprint regarding ADA compliance and best practices. Specifically, the upgrades are motivated by a complex web of deteriorated plumbing encased in concrete foundation which is increasingly detrimental to the sustainable function of the fountain.

The City of Alpena intends to use a portion of its federal economic recovery money from the Covid-stimulus and economic recovery initiatives to make the necessary improvements which impact the very center of community. This funding can be leveraged against other sources of funding within the community including funding from the County's Youth and Recreation fund specifically approved for the Plaza, and community donations. Our ability to leverage other funding sources provides us with the opportunity go beyond infrastructure repairs only and enhance the space for all users in the community.

City parks are public spaces for citizens to congregate and recreate safely and have been havens throughout and beyond the Covid pandemic. While other City parks need their share of attention as

well and simultaneously, Culligan Plaza is a priority, among others. Other parks will be addressed by the City of Alpena with equal due diligence and with other resources at the City's disposal, including and motivated by community interest and resources.

The Initial Proposed Concepts for Public Comment

The proposed tower at Culligan Plaza and addition of a sculptural element for display incorporated into the initial concept presented by the City of Alpena were privately funded offers to the City for potential incorporation in the plaza's overhaul as plans to resuscitate the plaza's upgrades followed Covid interruptions and long delays due to funding complications, including other City priorities.

First Federal Legacy Foundation (FFLF) has had a long-vested interest in the plaza's overhaul since the need for infrastructure upgrades of the plaza's fountain became apparent in 2009 and discussions ensued. With FFLF's recent offer of \$100,000 toward an enhanced water feature and Thunder Bay Arts Council's offer of a featured sculpture from its expanding Art Vision Alpena Bi-Path collection, the City began resuscitating efforts to revamp and upgrade the plaza in concert with these generous philanthropic offers to enhance the space while necessary infrastructure upgrades were being made.

The sculpture feature is *Water in Limestone* by artist Autumn Bildson, a Black River sculptural artist specializing in limestone carvings. Bildson is an accomplished Michigan artist and a featured artist in residence of the Alpena Wildlife Sanctuary who was vetted by the Thunder Bay Arts Council in 2022 for the commission of *Water in Limestone*. Over 100 donors from throughout the community donated in a year-long reveal and fundraising campaign for this commission with individual donations ranging from multiple \$5,000 contributions to dozens of \$25 contributions towards the project, including businesses, government agencies, foundation grants, and individual community patrons alike. Thunder Bay Arts offered the sculpture to be featured somehow in the Culligan Plaza at the City's discretion, highlighting Alpena's historic connection to limestone and water.

Initial plans were for the *Water in Limestone* to be a stand-alone pedestaled artistic expression, and a discrete addition to the plaza's landscape. Other considerations contemplated using the sculpture in the newly revamped water fountain, and potentially relocating the fountain to free up more space in a newly reconfigured plaza, although nothing was firm in the initial conceptualization presented by the City of Alpena. Committed space for the annual Christmas tree and Santa House were always part of the considerations, although not reflected in the artistic rendition revealed for public comments. The fountain would be a definitive feature of the plaza in all instances despite the artistic rendition's depictions. The exact form and location of the fountain and water feature remain tentative relative to the overall design possibilities.

The proposed tower of the initial concepts presented by the City of Alpena was inspired by Mike Kendzioriski at the behest of the FFLF for additional conceptual ideas given his track record for iconic architectural contributions to the community. It featured locally harvested white pine columns with limestone accents that would again highlight Alpena's heritage with lumber and limestone, while incorporating a lighting feature to highlight major annual celebrations (e.g., Christmas, 4th of July, etc.).

Kendzioriski is primarily responsible for the much-revered covered bridge and water tower at Duck Park, provided entirely by private donations and at no cost to the City of Alpena or its taxpayers. His proposal for the tower at Culligan Plaza included over one dozen private donors, mostly businesses with the

knowhow and access to materials, who would make this proposed concept happen at no cost to the City of Alpena or its taxpayers as other necessary infrastructure and additional aesthetic improvements were being made at the site. The proposed concept, again, was taken into consideration as a launching point for discussion and public feedback.

Reflection on Feedback

Considering initial public feedback to the proposed concept, the concept as initially presented has been halted and is pending reconsiderations based on that feedback and future iterations of design and public comment.

The following is a distilled and condensed synopsis of major points of concern expressed in the feedback received thus far as guidance moving forward:

1. Complete the necessary infrastructure improvements and meet ADA needs in a way that preserves the integrity of the existing space as much as possible while still enhancing the space and making it easier to maintain year-round (e.g., snow removal; landscape upkeep) – all based on the infrastructure assessments of the City.
2. Keep the water fountain/water feature front and center (e.g., required by stipulations of the deed, aesthetics of trickling water, ambiance, brown trout fishing for kids - all these things were always intended despite what the concept image renditions prepared by the City of Alpena may or may not have relayed).
3. Maintain small town charm and feel of the space – respecting the history and character of the downtown.
4. Maintain green space (flowers, trees, etc.) as possible while being practical for the maintenance of the space year-round.
5. Maintain the versatility of various requested public events for the space, including individual contemplation, small social gatherings, music, and entertainment venues for Friday nights downtown, etc., the annual Christmas tree celebrations, Santa House, 4th of July parade gatherings, demonstrations, etc. Culligan Plaza is among the most requested city parks for public events and gatherings.

Action Moving Forward

As follow-up to the initial concept reveal and the first phase of public feedback, The City of Alpena will proceed with a consult from a landscape architecture firm garnering alternative conceptual renditions of the space with elements of interest expressed through the committee and public input. Additional community feedback will be incorporated into new renditions as planning progresses.

FFLF will absorb the costs of such consultations as part of their contribution to the project and interest since inception.

In concert with a landscape architecture consultation, the City of Alpena will conduct a broader public survey of structural and aesthetic elements of primary interest to the community at large including and beyond the initial feedback provided.

The online public survey will be launched by the City of Alpena and available on their website on September 12th and will remain open through September 30th.

City of Alpena residents and the broader community are encouraged to provide further feedback to help shape future design elements of the Culligan Plaza project as it unfolds. These priorities and interests will be factored into concepts as they are further developed. They too will be given opportunity for further public feedback before final design concepts are determined by the City of Alpena.

Financial Considerations

As planned since the initial concept, the City of Alpena will absorb the cost of basic infrastructure and ADA compliance of the space, including that of the water fountain's overhaul, using City of Alpena tax dollars within their purview and responsibility of good governance and with available resources at their disposal for such purposes. It is a priority and a matter of due diligence.

Private contributions are encouraged and will help fund the more aesthetic additions as deemed appropriate by the City based on continued interest and public feedback and consensus building toward a final plan.

The City of Alpena must by law put out for bid and solicit RFPs for any projects with expenditures over \$10,000 where City tax dollars are being expended for any portion of any project, so expenditures concerning the component parts of this project, or other project of the City's domain, are subject to principles of transparency by public vote by the City Council as elected representatives.

As the Culligan Plaza project continues, public bid practices will be diligently followed as always by law and by principles of good governance and representation. The City of Alpena may accept in-kind donations of any size towards such projects at its discretion to complement such publicly expended resources and enhance final outcomes.

Engagement

To all who have expressed their interest and concerns regarding Culligan Plaza and any other concerns pertaining to the City of Alpena's purview of governance and management, including that of other parks and the need for improvements, the constructive feedback is invaluable and appreciated.