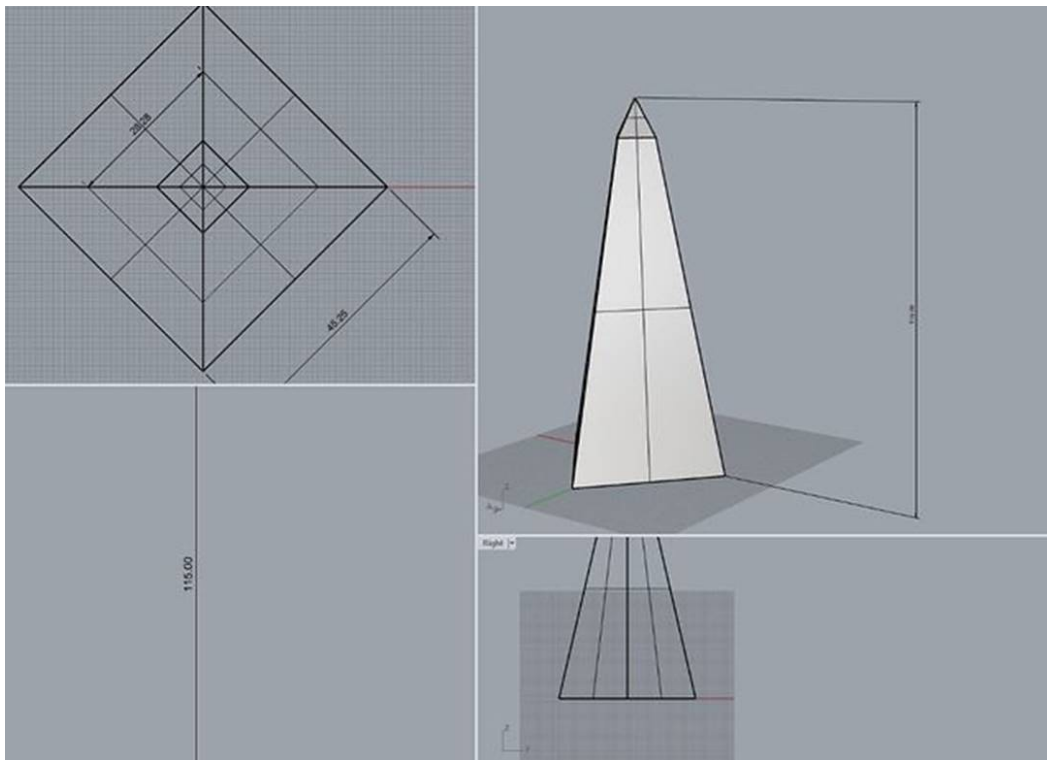




**To:** Mayor and City Council  
**From:** Brian Phillips, Assistant City Manager  
**Date:** February 22, 2022  
**Subject:** Referral Regarding Library in City Park

On November 16, 2021, the City Council requested a memo from staff regarding the proposal of Cameron Gray to place a sculpture in a City park which would function as a free library. In October, Mr. Gray emailed the City Council with his proposal. City staff has discussed the project with Mr. Gray to learn more about the details and his intentions.

The sculpture is proposed to be an obelisk shape with a free library incorporated into it. The sketches provided by Mr. Gray indicate the obelisk is to be approximately 45 inches per side and 9.5 feet in height, placed on a concrete slab. Mr. Gray would work with an architect to ensure the design and materials are structurally sound.



Mr. Gray proposes to own the sculpture, maintain it, and restock it with books on a regular basis. He has received an Iowa Arts Council grant to assist in the completion

of the project and has indicated he has consulted with the Ames Public Library staff regarding the collection. His desire is to locate it within a City park – he has identified Hira Park or Franklin Park as possibilities, based on data from census records indicating these two parks are closest to Ames’ highest black population neighborhoods.

**CURRENT FREE LITTLE LIBRARIES IN PARKS**

Parks and Recreation has an existing arrangement with Raising Readers (RR) to install free little libraries (FLL) in the park system for the past several years. This partnership involves RR providing the FLL, stocking/replenishing it with books, and performing repairs as needed. Parks and Recreation identifies the park locations and installs the little library. Below is a list of the parks that currently have a free little library:

Bandshell	Brookside (2)	Christofferson
Country Club Triangle	Daley	Franklin
Hutchison	Inis Grove	Lloyd Kurtz
Moore Memorial	Northridge Heights	O’Neil Roosevelt
Tahira and Labh Hira	Teagarden	

It should be noted that Franklin Park and Tahira and Labh Hira Park each have existing free little libraries installed.

**ART IN THE PARK**

The Public Art Commission (PAC) also has an Art in the Parks program whereby art pieces are located in the park system. Thus far, the following parks have Art in the Park pieces:

Ada Hayden	Bandshell	Brookside
Christofferson	Christopher Gartner	Daley
Duff Avenue	Emma McCarthy Lee	Franklin
Furman Aquatic Center	Moore Memorial	Munn Woods Entrance
Oakland Access	Old Town	Parkview
Roosevelt	Skate Park	Stuart Smith
Tahira and Labh Hira*	Teagarden	Tom Evans Plaza

\*PAC is currently looking to commission an artist to design an art piece for this park.

## **SIMILAR REQUESTS**

In recent years, Parks and Recreation staff was approached by an individual to put pianos in the park system. The individual received two donated pianos and they were placed in Tom Evans Plaza and Campustown Court. The individual was responsible for the maintenance of the pianos and was required to provide insurance as well. The pianos in the park lasted for two years and then the individual who had initiated the project moved out of Ames. No one was willing to take on this responsibility after the individual moved. The pianos were ultimately removed, as they deteriorated substantially in the outdoor environment.

## **ISSUES TO CONSIDER:**

If the City Council wishes to proceed with this request, there are several issues for the City Council to consider.

**1. Does the City Council wish to allow privately owned structures to be located on City property?**

Mr. Gray has indicated he would intend to maintain ownership of the obelisk. If owned by another person and on City property, the City would need to reach an agreement outlining terms such as maintenance, restocking, repairs, the length of time the structure may be in place, liability, and other matters. Regarding the length of time, Mr. Gray has indicated a desire for the obelisk to be permanent. City staff would recommend an arrangement for a period of two to five years, which could be renewed if the City Council desired to do so.

**2. Does the City Council wish to pursue this specific proposal, or should the City invite other proposals to be submitted?**

Mr. Gray has approached the City Council regarding this particular concept for a sculptural free library. Typically for City art initiatives, the City outlines the criteria and solicits proposals from artists, then chooses the proposal that best fits the City's desires. In this instance, the artist is approaching the City to place a sculpture; it is not known if other proposals might better fit the City Council's interests.

**3. Does the City Council wish to have staff work with Raising Readers to enhance and diversify book offerings in the Free Little Libraries currently in the parks?**

If the goal is to offer a more diverse collection of books that appeal to persons of color, this could be accomplished within the FLL currently in the parks. Mr. Gray could work with RR and the Ames Public Library to ensure the appropriate books get placed in the right locations.

**4. Should further feedback be solicited from neighbors, Parks and Recreation Commission, and/or Public Art Commission?**

Feedback from these groups would be helpful to determine the interest and desires of the neighbors around these potential locations, and to identify how this proposal fits into the City's overall parks and art goals and programs. **If the City Council wishes to proceed with this project, it would be appropriate for the City Council to refer the request to staff to seek this feedback and then consult with Mr. Gray regarding an agreement.**