

DISCOVER
Freedom Park
Sculpture Initiative

Atlanta, GA



Community Partners

Freedom Park Conservancy

Bureau of Cultural Affairs Public Art Program

Fulton County Arts Council

Metropolitan Public Art Coalition

This report was prepared by consultant Jennifer
McGregor to identify the potential for sculpture in
Freedom Park and the next steps.

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By Jennifer McGregor

Freedom Park Sculpture Initiative

The idea to initiate a sculpture program for Freedom Park has been brewing for some time. This planning effort was initiated by the Freedom Park Conservancy (FPC) and the Metropolitan Public Art Coalition (MPAC). It has been funded in part by an NEA Community Partners planning grant through the Georgia Council for the Arts, and with funding from the Bureau of Cultural Affairs' Public Art Program and the community partners. An open forum was held on May 10, 2003 to solicit ideas for sculpture in the park.

This report discusses the background and features that distinguish Freedom Park and identifies a plan for *Discover Freedom Park*, a bi-annual sculpture program in the park. The plan outlines how such a program might be developed including a timeline and a budget. The recommendations are intended to be a flexible first step in planning.

A) Background and Description

Freedom Park was created through a grassroots initiative galvanized by the group CAUTION which arrested the development of Presidential Parkway and interchange and claimed 210 acres of open space as public, park land. The goals for the park were developed through the cooperative efforts of the Freedom Park Conservancy, the City of Atlanta's Planning and Development Department, the City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation and Cultural Affairs, and the Path Foundation. In 1994 the Freedom Park Master Plan was approved and in 1995 Phase 1 of the park building began.

The unusual shape of Freedom Park bears the imprint of the land condemned for the original highway. This cross shape provides open space access to the neighborhoods of Candler Park, Old Fourth Ward, Druid Hills, Poncey Highland, and Inman Park. The Carter Presidential Library and the Carter Center are at the park's center and the Old Fourth Ward and the King Historic District lie to the west. By linking the Carter Center to the Martin Luther King Jr. Historic District, the park recognizes Atlanta's Civic and Human Rights heritage and makes the park a unique place in the nation.

Many highways have irrevocably divided neighborhoods, but Freedom Park with its trails and open green space has become an asset as it threads through these diverse neighborhoods. Paths have been developed through the park for walking and biking. There are few amenities with two drinking fountains, and minimal signage.

The roadways passing through the park create several recognizable sections:

- West Parkway runs through the Old Fourth Ward and connects to the Martin Luther King Historic District.
- MLK Gateway is at the western edge of the park.
- The Carter Center sits at the center of the park and manages the open space that surrounds the center.
- Ponce de Leon Gateway is at the northern edge of the park.
- East Parkway connects Druid Hills and Candler Park stretching from Moreland Avenue to South Ponce de Leon.
- Lullwater Creek is a sensitive watershed area adjacent to Paideia School.
- The Moreland Gateway marks the end of Freedom Parkway.

B) Opportunities for Public Art

Freedom Park's site, its strong relationship to the surrounding neighborhoods, and the willingness of FPC to embark on a public art program creates an excellent opportunity to initiate a vibrant and memorable public art program.

There are a number of ways to approach programming sculpture in the park.

First and foremost, it is important to conceive an art program for the park that is manageable for the two volunteer organizations, Freedom Park Conservancy and Metropolitan Public Art Coalition, and dramatic enough to spark interest in the park from beyond the surrounding neighborhoods.

The goal is to commission high quality, memorable projects in Freedom Park that help to define the park and its relationship to the surrounding neighborhoods and the city of Atlanta. For the first five years, the program should focus on temporary projects and only embark on permanent projects as capital projects are undertaken by the FPC, the city, the county or the state. Although there are several permanent artworks in the park, developing a temporary exhibition program will be more fruitful than expanding a permanent collection at this point in time. *Discover Freedom Park* should begin with an exhibition based approach that targets a different part of the park each year. The goal is for Atlanta's citizens, including the Park's neighbors, the business community, and metro area residents to discover Freedom Park.

Benefits of a temporary exhibition program:

- allows for flexibility as this young park develops
- can be conceived to draw attention to certain parts of the park
- a program of changing art can give people reasons to return
- temporary art can be experimental, challenging and topical
- a compelling way to introduce contemporary art to the public
- Avoids the need for long term conservation and collection management

While the temporary program develops, the Community Partners should plan for future permanent art opportunities in an opportunistic fashion. As capital projects or improvements are planned for the park, the Community Partners should consider the benefits of an artist as a team member or as a lead

designer to identify opportunities to collaborate on design elements such as footbridges, benches, picnic areas, dog walking areas, playgrounds as they are conceived and developed. Experience gained through temporary art and connections with MPAC and area artists will help to build the expertise for developing permanent art projects.

The successful installation of the Thornton Dial sculpture at the Ponce de Leon Gateway is likely to draw other proposals of permanent art, but future permanent art should be carefully reviewed. Maintenance funds should be in place for all future permanent art and the placement should be carefully selected in light of future plans for the park.

A public art advisory committee consisting of representatives from the Community Partners is recommended to review all art planned for the park and to take an active role in building opportunities for temporary and permanent art.

C) Implementation

Since the park has the potential to be a new model for an urban art park, it will be important to build a framework for managing commissioned art, gifts, and other projects that might be proposed by others, or ideas that the Freedom Park Conservancy would like to initiate. Discover Freedom Park, a program for temporary sculpture, outlined in the next section, is a mechanism to begin the crucial next stage of experimentation of new ideas for art in the

park. The period to test partnerships, build a constituency for art, and seek funding sources is critical to lay the groundwork for more ambitious long term and permanent art. Without strong, well-conceived working guidelines it will be too easy for the park to be a “dumping ground”. There is much to learn from the experience of the Thornton Dial sculpture.

We recommend that a Public Art Curator be hired to develop specific guidelines and to manage all future efforts to develop art in Freedom Park. The Community Partners can form an Advisory Committee to help to identify funding sources and serve as the approval group for all art in the park. The Curator will act as the day-to-day decision maker and point person for art in the park. Ideally, this person would be contracted by the Freedom Park Conservancy, or possibly by MPAC. The Public Art Curator’s responsibilities would include:

- Work with the City and County to identify projects for the park that dovetail capital improvements in the park, and those that are appropriate under the City’s Public Art Master Plan.
- Develop an operating plan for the park that identifies specific areas for development, criteria for selecting projects and art, and addresses issues of collections management such as gift guidelines and maintenance consistent with the City’s Public Art Master Plan.
- Review all unsolicited proposals for art in the park, determine the feasibility of the project, and bring to the Advisory Committee a recommendation regarding approval.

- Work with community groups and others to help guide special projects and events for the park, in effect representing the park in partnership projects with others.
- Oversee all approvals and logistics concerning siting, installation and duration of art in the park.
- Work with the Guest Curator to implement the temporary sculpture program.

There is often an impulse to pursue a plan that targets sites alone, but here procedures are just as important. Fortunately there is much to build on, as indicated in the information that accompanies this report. It will be essential to tailor guidelines to the specific needs of Freedom Park and to provide the flexibility to encompass innovative ideas. This will require a person who is familiar with public art planning and project management.

D) Discover Freedom Park - a program of art in the park

Plan for *Discover Freedom Park*, an exhibition of at least 6 projects to be on view for 3-9 months. Consider sculpture in its broadest definition - outdoor projects conceived and built by artists or artist teams. Sponsor on a bi-annual basis until the infrastructure is in place to do it more frequently. This infrastructure involves curatorial, project management, planning, outreach, and administration. The responsibilities entailed are best divided among a juror/curator, project manager, and the Community Partners, but can be divided differently depending on the format of the team and the specific

program and projects. Utilizing the expertise of each Community Partner and expanding the core group to include the Fulton County Arts Council along with other businesses, corporations and local groups will be essential for the program's long-term success.

Identify Area/Topics for each exhibition. The first year could look at the potential for the park, projects that identify Freedom Park as a place. From a logistical point of view it might be helpful to locate the projects in one or two adjacent areas. Here are some ideas for topical approaches to open the discussion for the first exhibit.

Green Atlanta - a series of projects that look at the environmental impact of the park and call attention to the plants and wild life.

Freedom - this is a huge topic that is suited to the history of the site and the civil rights struggle; however, it's a topic that has been dealt with in Atlanta many times. Looking at challenges to freedom that we face in the 21st century might offer a new take on the subject.

Meet your neighbor - a series of sculpture related events that bring people into the park, that encourage interaction among people in the park. This could include anything from strategically oriented picnic tables to outdoor film screenings.

Mobility - since the park is so linear and the paths are the main attraction, a series of sculptures might relate to vehicles and movement through the park.

Administration

This plan is developed with the idea of a joint partnership between FPC and MPAC, but it will be important to define the role of both groups for administration, fundraising, curatorial input, project management, education, government, community and public outreach. The complementary strengths and different areas of expertise should insure the success of the program.

Community Partners - FPC and MPAC

- Fundraise for exhibition
- Outreach to the key neighborhood groups and government agencies for the exhibition in general and specific projects as needed
- Coordinate approvals
- Seek in-kind contributions of materials, products and services
- Draft and send press releases, announcements
- Build excitement for the project through different events, these might include display of proposals, artist talks, related exhibitions of work by selected artists
- Organize opening celebration
- Plan and implement public programs in the park once the projects are completed
- Oversee PR and distribution of information in park, on website, etc.

Selecting Artists

Since engaging and innovative projects are the goal, strong curatorial viewpoint is essential. Invite a Guest Curator or Juror to select artists. The Guest Curator could be a local curator or nationally known curator with expertise in outdoor, project-based sculpture. The final group of artists could be identified through a call to artists based on the Area/Topic identified. In the beginning it will be important to select artists through a call-to-artists to create the pool. It will be essential to strive for a mix of local, regional and national artists. Artists should be selected based on slides, the finalists will develop specific proposals for the site.

Guest Curator responsibilities

- Help to refine the Area/Topic, and draft the call to artists
- Recommend artists to receive the call to artists
- Review all the submissions and select artists
- Make site visits with artists to discuss their ideas
- Review artists designs

Project Management

Strong project management is essential to insure that the artists' projects are realized and that the program is successful. Until there is staff in place at FPC or MPAC, this should be contracted out and not left to volunteers. The Project Manager or Project Coordinator should be a local artist or person with experience who is an independent contractor hired by FPC or MPAC.

Project Manager responsibilities

- Send out call to artists directly to artists, through organizations, email lists and websites
- Receive, organize and return submissions
- Communicate with selected artists
- Arrange for artist agreements
- Plan for site preparation and installation with each artist
- Work with Community Partners to connect artists to community
- Coordinate the installation logistics for each artwork
- Plan for documentation of the completed work
- Supervise the removal of all artworks

Outreach and Public Programs are essential to the success of the program and should be planned and implemented drawing on the expertise of the selected artists and with the involvement of neighborhood groups and schools.

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Appendix

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This Appendix was prepared by the Metropolitan
Public Art Coalition, Inc. (MPAC)

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