

CITY OF HARRISONBURG



January 13, 2026 City Council Meeting

Title

Consider approval of the release of a call for artists for public art at the Spraygrounds at Ralph Sampson Park — Chris and Steve Carpenter

Summary

The 6,000-square-foot Spraygrounds at Ralph Sampson Park opened July 1, 2025, with 36 spray features and interactive elements designed for various ages. Harrisonburg residents Steve and Chris Carpenter wish to privately fund the design and installation of three public artworks at the Spraygrounds. The proposed locations, already vetted by the City Department of Parks and Recreation, are:

- A) East exterior wall of the bathhouse/pumphouse, facing the Spraygrounds, for a mosaic installation.
- B) Main entry to the Spraygrounds, to provide a welcoming archway over the sidewalk, similar to arches at A Dream Come True playground and the new Kids Castle.
- C) Roundabout near the entrance to the Spraygrounds, for sculptural work(s) depicting children at play.

The Carpenters seek City Council approval to issue three calls for artists. After the committee selects the artists and the conceptual designs the Carpenters will return to City Council for final approval to move forward.

Recommendation

Option 1- Approve the release of a call for artists for public art at the Spraygrounds at Ralph Sampson Park

Fiscal Impact

No fiscal impact—100% donor funded

Context & Analysis

Steve and Chris Carpenter have lived in Harrisonburg for 23 years, actively attending church on the 400 Kelley Street site of the City's historic segregated pool; and learning of the trauma the Northeast Neighborhood community experienced during 1950s-1960s Urban Renewal.

Their exuberant experience of public art during their travels led the Carpenters to propose a collaboration designed to add an extra touch of creativity and joy to the new Spraygrounds, while also recognizing the neighborhood's history.

A public meeting was held on November 20, 2025 to introduce the project to community members, generating ideas for the new works of art and preferred locations. The project committee (the Carpenters, with representatives from the City, Arts Council of the Valley, and the Northeast Neighborhood) used feedback from the meeting to select the three locations and develop content themes.

Commissioned artwork will be designed to complement the bright primary colors embodied in Spraygrounds water features. In addition - from the call for artists through the design, fabrication, and installation process - each piece of artwork will be designed with a focus on safety and in consultation with appropriate City departments. Spraygrounds features include a frog, snail, turtle, snake, tree, and flower. Artists will be encouraged to consider the designs and primary colors incorporated into the Spraygrounds; the history of the Northeast Neighborhood; and the joyful nature of children at play. Upon completion, ownership of the artworks will be conveyed to the City of Harrisonburg.

Proposed project timeline:

- January 16 - Issue calls for artists
- March 1 – Submission deadline
- March 24 – Present design recommendations to City Council for approval
- March 25 – Contract with artists
- April 15 – Final safety review by City
- May 22 – Complete site prep
- June 1 – Artworks completed
- June 19 – Artwork installations, final landscaping
- July 4th weekend – Community Celebration

This donation aligns with the Northeast Neighborhood Small Area Plan. The plan highlights that "while some public art exists—mainly along the western edge near N. Mason Street—there is an opportunity to strengthen Neighborhood identity and sense of place through the expansion and strategic placement of public art and public realm improvements." In the Focus Area of History and Culture, Strategy 1.3 calls for incorporation of public art that raises awareness about what was lost during the Urban Renewal process and celebrates the Neighborhood's diversity of

languages and ethnic backgrounds today through a variety of public art media (e.g., sculpture, performances, festivals).

Options

Option 1- Approve the release of a call for artists for public art at the Spraygrounds at Ralph Sampson Park

Option 2- Deny the release of a call for artists for public art at the Spraygrounds at Ralph Sampson Park