

Erie Street Plaza: A summary of the winning proposal

Stormwater, steam, marsh grass and bamboo, reflected and projected light all characterize this new civic place.

Wrapped by the infrastructural and geographical frames of wooden boardwalk and steel bulkhead, the plaza is articulated as a field of custom pre-cast pavers distributed so as to maximize variability and flexibility. The pavers are interspersed with planted islands of native marsh grasses, lawn and bamboo groves, arranged along a gradient from wet to dry; low to high, indigenous to exotic. It is a reflection of the surrounding neighborhood and amenities. The plaza's interdeterminancy is accentuated by the erratic scattering of luminous fiberglass benches and seatwalls, which capture and reflect ambient light; their irregular placement allow for multiple and diverse social groupings or solitary retreats. The subtly folded groundplane directs stormwater to the low marsh and to six collection pits in the bamboo grove; here immersion heaters generate steam that amplify the vivacity and evergreen qualities of the bamboo and create a welcome respite from the cold winter winds.

RIVERWALK: The Milwaukee Riverwalk system is extended as wide pathways along the site's northwestern and northeastern edges. Typical riverwalk detailing and materials are proposed: ipe plans and sleepers on a concrete slab with concrete frost walls all around.

CONCRETE UNIT PAVERS: The plaza field is articulated with pre-cast concrete pavers in a 5-piece set of custom forms.

PLANTINGS: Bamboo groves would be planted with two of the most vigorous cold-climate varieties available. Low areas near the river would be planted with a combination of native grasses and dwarf lake irises.

STORMWATER 'STEAM' GENERATORS: Stormwater from the upper portion of the site will be collected in six concrete pits, which are covered with steel grates. An immersion heater unit inside the pit generates steam from the collected stormwater. To ensure that all pits are functioning equally, a pvc pipe connects each of the pits to evenly distribute collected water. The warmth and moisture generated by the steam pits would help keep the bamboo evergreen in Milwaukee's climate.

BENCHES: There would be 8-10 benches in different shapes, custom-made of luminous fiberglass and interspersed among the planters and bamboo trees.

LIGHTING: Dramatic lighting is proposed for select locations. This includes at least uplighting in the immersion heater pits and in the bamboo grove. It is also proposed to light the inside of the luminous fiberglass benches that are nearest to the water's edge.

BULKHEAD WALL MODIFICATIONS: Grade behind a portion of the existing bulkhead wall is lowered by a maximum of approximately two feet. A 4" wide vertical slit is cut into every other corrugation surface, allowing for river views and for occasional flooding at radically high water.