City of Ashland seeks solar art project

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City of Ashland Intern Laura Loucks, a Northland College senior in Sustainable Community Development, holds a copy of the request for proposals issued recently by the city of Ashland seeking ideas for an artistic solar art project to be erected at H. Pearson Plaza. Loucks, who is serving as project manager, said the undertaking is intended to be educational as well as artistic, stirring interest in solar energy.

[Rick Olivo/Staff Photo](https://www.apg-wi.com/users/profile/Larry%20Servinsky)

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The city of Ashland is seen by its residents and elected officials as a place with a unique vision of its place as a sustainable city of the future.

With that in mind, the city has issued a request for proposals for an artistic solar public art project to be erected at the city’s H. Pearson Plaza behind the Ashland City Hall.

According to the request for proposal, the main goal of the art installation will be to incorporate solar panels to provide an educational opportunity, as well as to further beautify the park area.

Energy created from the solar panels will be monitored and described on a plaque adjacent to the area

The RFP said the three goals of the solar art installation are to provide educational material on the process of photovoltaic energy generation, to incorporate the installation’s energy production into an aesthetically beautiful art piece and to “help establish Ashland as a sustainable, unique place to live and work.”

The project manager behind the request for proposals is Laura Loucks, a Northland College senior from Eagle, a community in Waukesha County. Loucks is interning with the city and using the effort as her senior capstone project at Northland.

“We are hoping to find a local artist to design and install this structure,” Loucks said, observing that the RFP left the design itself pretty much open within certain requirements. “We don’t want to limit anybody pretty much in any way, so the main focus is to incorporate solar panels, but it can be anything that you want it to be.”

The short list of art requirements includes the requisite solar panels, and the work must be able to connect with the electric grid. It must include charging points for electronics and lights or lighting for night use. The work also must incorporate local culture, history and/or the natural environment, and the artist must be a resident of Ashland, Bayfield or Iron County.

Beyond these few fundamentals, the nature of the piece is left up to the imagination of the artist, Loucks said.

“The focus is not on the amount of energy it produces, it’s more of an educational piece,” she said. “Hopefully we will be able to set up a website with live updates of the energy it has created.”

Loucks said the goal of the project was to familiarize people with the benefits of solar power.

“Solar energy is becoming very large here in Wisconsin, and with Cheq Bay Renewables, there is a group buy that is being worked on right now for people to buy solar panels for their houses,” she said, referring to the non-profit organization working to make renewable energy more accessible in Ashland and Bayfield Counties. “What we are doing is to increase awareness of solar panels and demonstrating how they work.”

In selecting H. Pearson Plaza for the art installation, the city is trying to pick a place that maximizes public exposure. In tying the demonstration into an art project, the goal is to stir public interest in photovoltaic energy.

“Making it artistic makes it more interesting than just panels,” Loucks observed.

Loucks and City of Ashland Planning and Development Director April Kroner created the idea for the solar art installation jointly.

“I wanted to do the solar aspect and she had the idea for the art piece, so we sort of worked together,” Loucks said.

The tentative timeline for the project calls for proposals to be delivered to the city by March 19. A panel review will take place March 19-23 with notice of the award being made March 23 and presentation to the Planning Commission and Parks and Recreation Committee on April 3.

Plans call for the project to be presented to the City Council at the April 17 meeting and the project design and budget finalized on July 1.

The city would initiate securing grants and other funding from July through November, with budget approval by the Planning Council and the City Council taking place in the winter of 2018 and installation commencing in the spring and summer of 2019. Completion of the installation would be by October of 2019.

Those interested in participating can request a copy of RFP#18-01 from the City of Ashland Planning Department or by visiting the Ashland City website at [www.coawi.org](http://www.coawi.org/).

Proposals must be submitted in electronic format via e-mail or flash drive (preferred) along with two printed hard copies to the City of Ashland Planning and Development Office in Ashland City Hall, attention: Megan McBride, assistant planner, 601 Main Street West Ashland WI 54806.

Specific proposal requirements and other information are contained in the request for proposals. The requirements include a letter of interest, concept of the proposed art piece, concept design, budget estimate, project schedule, a resume and work samples.

The applications will be reviewed by Kroner, Loucks, Ashland Director of Parks and Recreation Sara Hudson, Northland College Assistant Professor of Sustainable Community Development and faculty advisor Bill Tochterman and Chequamegon Bay Renewables Board President Bill Bailey.

The top three candidates will receive a $100 gift certificate and their proposals will be presented for final selection to the Plan Commission, Parks and Recreation Committee and the City Council.

Further information on the project may be obtained via e-mail with Loucks at [Louckl312@myemail.northland.edu](mailto:Louckl312@myemail.northland.edu).