

A photograph of a river with a small waterfall or rapids, surrounded by dense trees and rocks. The water is turbulent and white with foam as it flows over dark, jagged rocks. The surrounding area is filled with bare, dark tree branches and some green foliage. The overall scene is natural and somewhat somber due to the lack of leaves on the trees.

# Concord River Greenway, Lowell MA Public Art Plan

Artists: Mags Harries  
Lajos Héder

December 2006



## Eulogy for Thoreau, May 9th, 1862

*The other weapon with which he conquered all obstacles in science was practice. He knew how to sit immovable, a part of the rock he rested on, until the bird, the reptile, the fish, which had retired from him, should come back, and resume its habits, nay, moved by curiosity, should come to him and watch him.*

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Concord River Greenway Art Plan

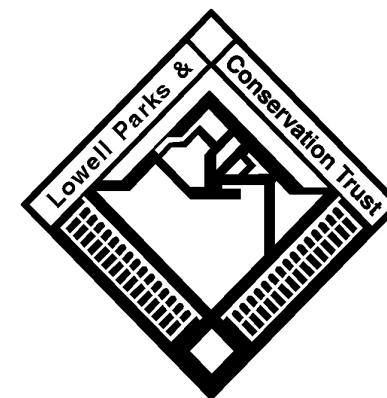
The Concord River Greenway Project has been a long standing community effort which is now progressing closer toward realization. The Artists, Mags Harries and Lajos Héder, were invited in early 2006 to create a plan introducing the artists' point of view into the overall design of the Greenway and to identify specific opportunities for art works. This report summarizes the results of this work.

The purpose of this Art Plan is to support the effort of the Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust to create the Greenway and to enhance it with the contribution of Artists. The Planning effort has been supported by the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA).

It became clear to us from the very beginning that at this site the Concord River itself is the primary aesthetic artifact and that anything an artist does here should serve to enhance people's experience of the river. The natural environment created by the river and the adjacent landscape are very dramatic and exciting. The artist can focus the views and facilitate discovery of special places and should not distract from or compete with these. The historic industrial remnants that appear along the river offer additional sculptural potential. The places provided should include a range from solitary contemplation, to social settings. The art projects can be temporary as well as permanent. They should provide settings for performances, celebrations and seasonal rituals.

We expected to collect many individual stories of life along the Concord River, but at our community meetings we found that for most people the river has not been accessible up to now, it is yet to be discovered as a personal experience. When we walked along the river with a community group last spring, the discovery was just beginning for most of the participants and created great excitement. Most of the stories are yet to be written.

The plan for the Greenway was developed by the Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust. The Art Plan was funded in part by a grant from the Fund for the Arts, a restricted fund of the New England Foundation for the Arts.







Where would you like to stop and spend more time?

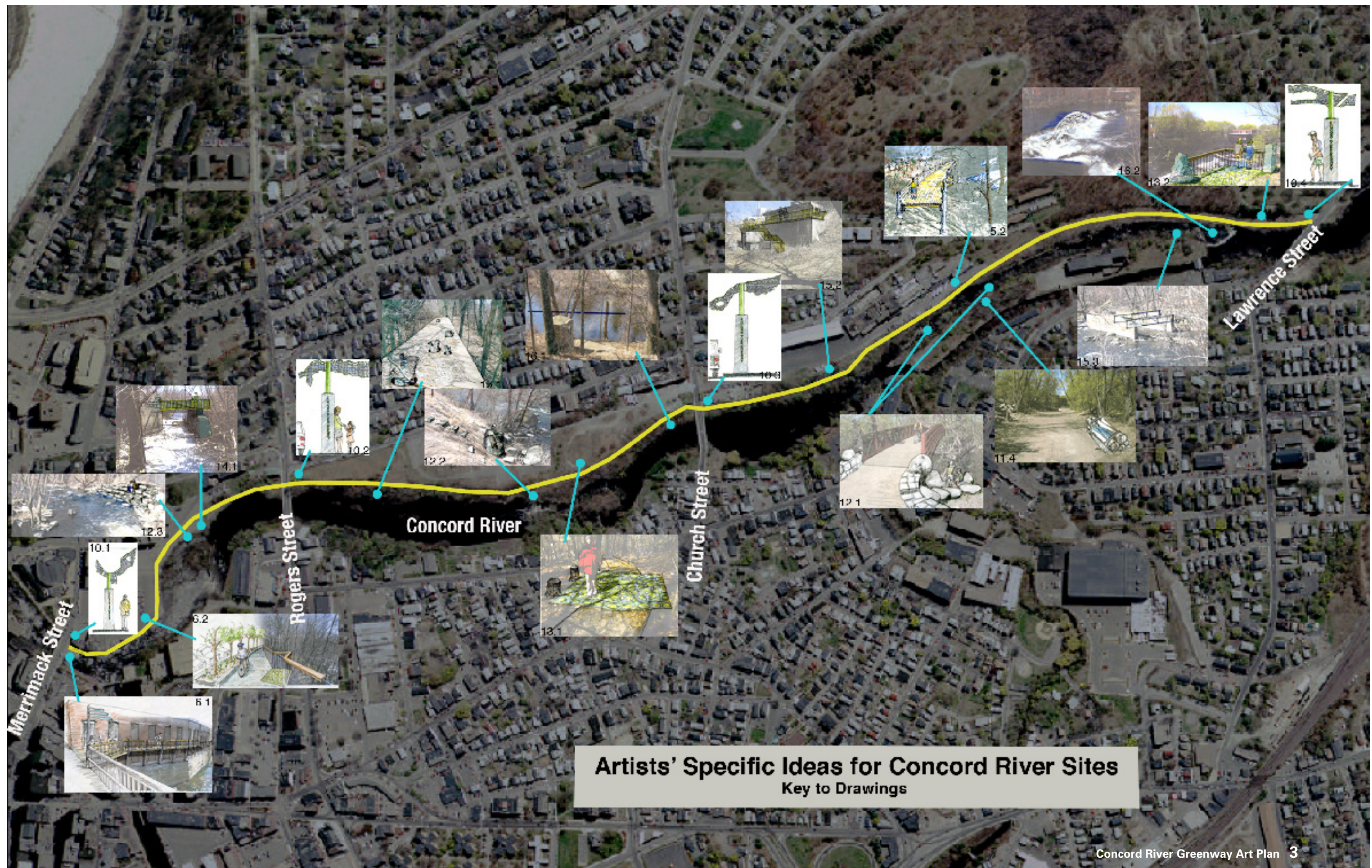


Identified sites by 30+ community participants



Identified sites by the artists





**Artists' Specific Ideas for Concord River Sites**  
Key to Drawings



**Artists’ concerns about the trail alignment and construction:**

The purpose of the Greenway is to bring people to the Concord River and help them enjoy it. In other words, the primary purpose is an aesthetic experience. The way the trail is placed into the environment will determine the quality of this experience. Therefore the alignment of the trail and the way it is inserted and constructed along the riverbank needs to be the primary concern of the artist. If this aspect of the trail does not work in the best way possible, no amount of added art work will make up for it.

The route of the future Greenway passes through a great deal of heavily vegetated, rugged rocky terrain with a narrow right of way. The trail should be built with a light touch, with minimal impact on the topography, trees and views. The trail should get people to the many dramatic, beautiful views of the river and interfere with the landscape as little as possible.

The preliminary engineering drawings for the alignment and construction of the trail raise concerns and we hope that further development of the design will reduce the impacts on the landscape. If the structures become too heavy handed, they will dominate the landscape and much of its beauty will be lost.

The proposed alignment, for most of its length is along the top of the bank which puts people furthest from the river end exposes them to the views and effects of the parking lots and other adjacent industrial structures.

The City of Lowell has now committed to select the alternative that includes two pedestrian bridges crossing the river to and from the island which will avoid the steepest sections of the bank and alleviate some of our early concerns. The engineers’ proposal for this section (according to information supplied by Earth Tech) would have necessitated the clearance and re-grading of a swath of land about 40 foot wide. This would have removed vegetation and alter existing grade for most of the width of the riverbank (see cross section drawings on Earth Tech 25% design drawings, sheets Typ-1, Crit-1 and Crit-2). The aesthetic quality of this section of the Trail will be greatly enhanced by crossing the river and using the existing trail right-of-way on the island.

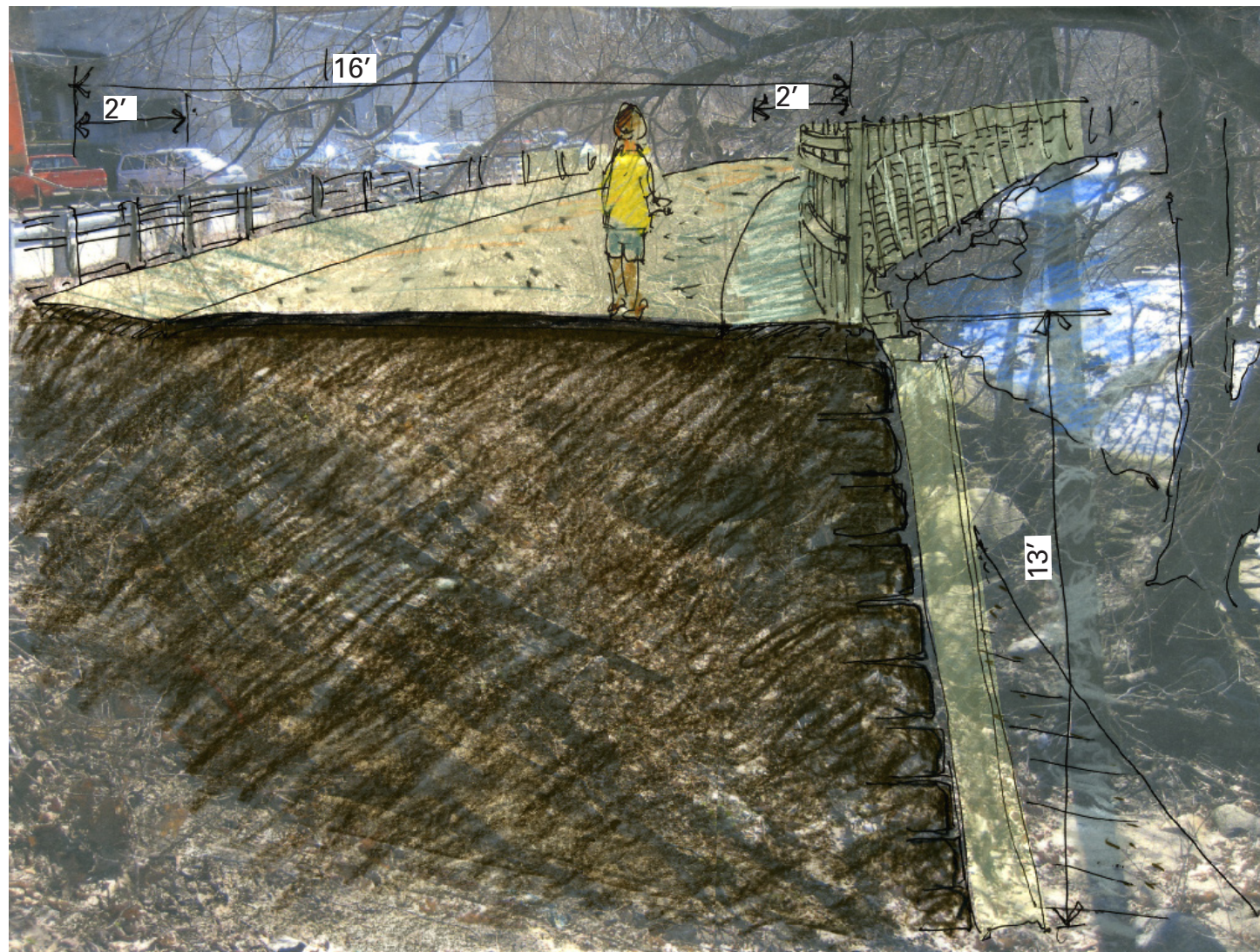
**Artists’ recommendations regarding Trail Alignment and Construction:**

1. The bridges proposed as the favored alternative to the difficult section at Bradford Industries provide an aesthetically preferable option. We recommend that the bridges should be built at 8’ wide (the bridge illustrated on the Earth Tech Gen-1 is actually 8’ wide). 8’ wide bridges will have a better, more intimate scale and will be less expensive. At the selected sites there are potential support points closer to the river that could shorten the spans and reduce structural

costs. Instead of the standard prefabricated bridge illustrated, the bridges can be designed with the participation of artists and, produce lighter, more graceful and site specific structures. If the width and the span are reduced, the bridges can still come in below the estimated budget.

2. Reduce trail width from 12’ to 8’ at the remaining steepest, roughest sections. This will not significantly impact the usability of the trails. Many sections of the trails along the Charles River in Boston and the trail around Fresh Pond in Cambridge, both very heavily used , are only 8’ wide. Consider placing the trail on a deck structure supported on posts where the terrain is particularly rugged, as along the Bradford Industries Properties. The posts can be anchored into the ledge and placed with light construction equipment. This will allow leaving the existing grade and trees in place, will not interrupt the existing drainage patterns. It will put people in a better relationship to the river.
3. At the sections where the Trail will remain along the industrial properties, move the trail away from the industrial property lines and down in elevation by 3 ‘ or more to allow vegetation to shield the trail users from the parking and service lots and create a more complete, aesthetically pleasing natural environment focused on the river and its natural environment. See Drawing 5.2 for illustration of these recommendations.
4. At the downtown entrance attach a cantilevered walkway to the Merrimack Community College building in order to enter the trail at a beautiful dramatic point by the river. The current plan takes the Trail through the Davidson Street parking lot, through two right angle turns away from the river by the dumpsters service yard to mid-block crossing at Merrimack Street that will have no visual connection to the river. This is an entrance/exit to the trail that is very unsatisfactory both aesthetically and functionally. At the most active downtown connection to the trail this solution would miss the opportunity to attract people to it. The adjacent space to the entrance we propose is now used as an internet café and could be compatible with the walkway and terrace. It is likely that the walkway could be supported on the existing foundations and the costs would not be exorbitant. Handicapped access may still need to occur through the parking lot. See drawing 6.1.



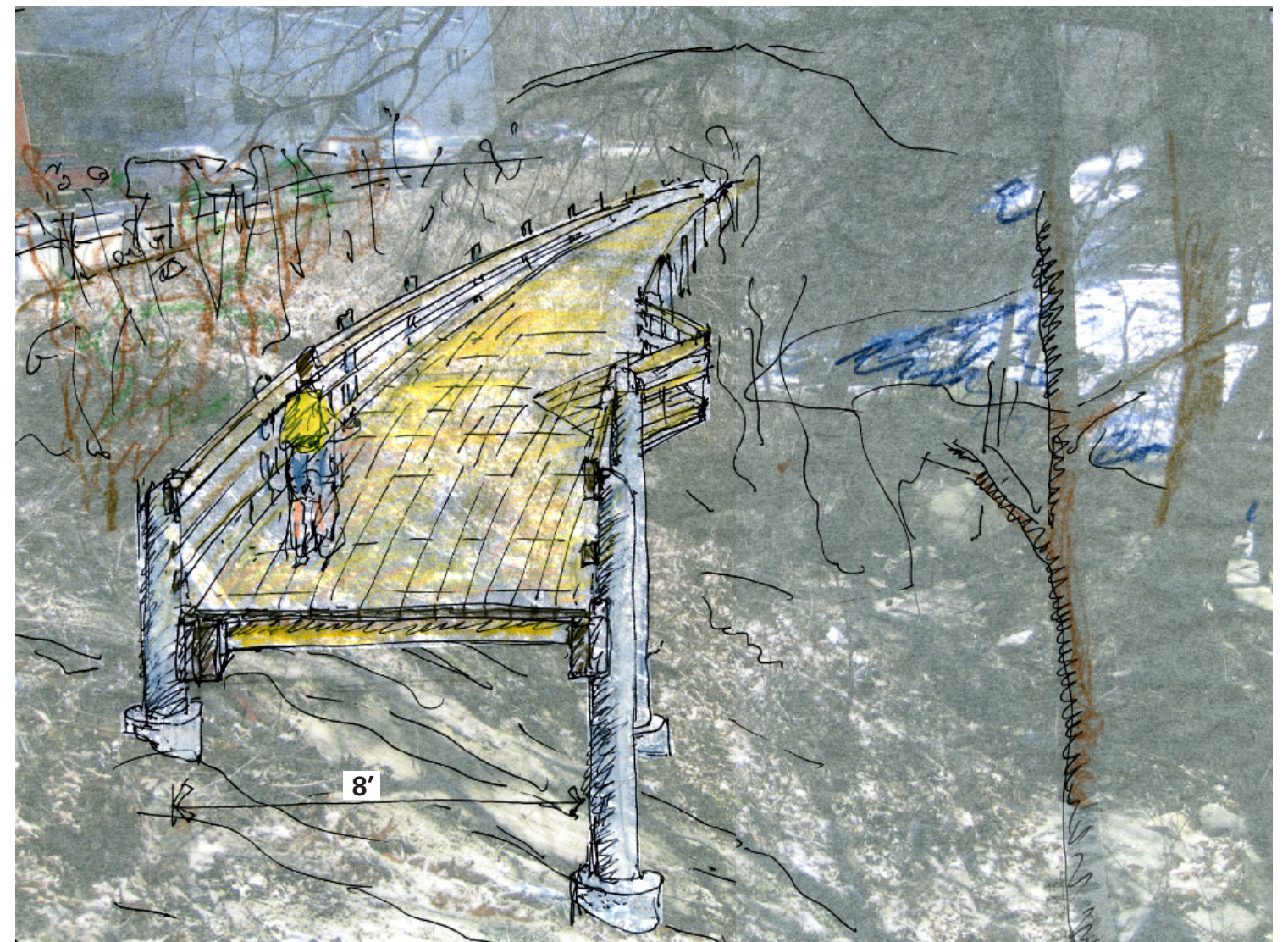


1.

Alignment and design proposed by Earth Tech - most of this condition eliminated by Bridge Alternative

## Design of Trail at steep, narrow sections

Trail on posts proposed by artists for remaining steep, rugged sections



2.



**Artist proposed improvements at  
Downtown section of Trail**



1.

Cantilevered Trail entrance at  
Merrimack Street Bridge

Retrofit of edge and rail at Davidson  
Street Lot with Lookout



2.



## Native American presence on the Concord River Greenway Trail

The Concord River and its confluence with the Merrimack have been historically significant as Native American fishing grounds. There was always a representative of the local native American community organization (GLICA) at the community meetings and an expressed desire to have a Native American presence on the trail.

A representative GLICA made a fish trap out of young saplings and brought it to one of the meetings. This was something he remembered from his family and it was the first time he had made one, basically from memory. He also said that these devices would be illegal to use now.

This Art master Plan recommends artists working on the Greenway tread lightly and respect the environment. This is in keeping with native American values. The Concord River Greenway can become an element in the education of children to respect and appreciate their environment.

We suggest that on a significant day that the Native American Community chooses there should be a festival or performance along the Greenway. School kids from Lowell can participate, the tribe members can share their knowledge of plant life, the uses for medicine, utility and habitats. A whole curriculum can become a part of this so that respect for the river can be taught and the students can learn about the traditional ways. A site for this festival along the Greenway should be selected in collaboration with GLICA.



## Opportunities for Artists Works along the Greenway:

With the 2 Bridge alternative most of the major alignment issues that caused aesthetic concerns will be resolved, with some remaining at the downtown end and around the Rogers Street Bridge. Artists participating in the detailed design of the Trail should continue to pay attention to the way the design details of the Trail can contribute in many ways to the delights of the trail, emphasizing places for views, gathering and intimate contemplation. Focus on special place, details, materials and intimate events will provide adventures for the trail users.

To discover the particular values of the Concord River, the artists walked the future trail with many interested members of the community. People placed flags to identify sites that had special interest and meaning to them.

We discovered important seasonal variations. In early spring the route had continuous views of the river, the snowmelt provided more water, the rapids produced more sound. Later in the season the trees leafed out, the river played hide-and seek with them, the water was quieter. Revealing and hiding different things for different seasons will add rhythm and anticipation to the Trail experience.

The river and the bank is rich with remaining industrial structures, which have over time become reduced, mysterious and absorbed into the landscape. We found many of them to be of great sculptural interest and rich catalysts for potential art or performance projects.

The following sketches show ideas that we generated in response to specific sites. Other artists, if engaged to create work for the trail, will bring a variety of other ideas. These sketches can be a beginning, to spark the imagination and stimulate conversation and some of them should be developed into actual projects.

We would not want to prescribe and limit the creativity of future work, but we suggest that some principles are observed:

- **Make each artwork function as a place for individuals or groups of people**
- **Relate all work directly to the River, its views, movements**
- **Respect the forms of the land and vegetation**
- **Relate to the changing seasons**
- **Re-use old industrial artifacts and materials taken during construction**

As this area will have limited public supervision and probably limited maintenance budgets, artworks must be simple, made of durable, weathering materials.





2.



3.



4.

5.



## Examples of Trail Details

1. Reuse old structure off main path - Town Lake, Austin
2. Wood foot bridge - Romania
3. Raised park trail - The Keys, Florida

Works by public artists:

4. Martin Puryear - Fairmont Park, Philadelphia
5. Mary Miss - Greenwood Park, Des Moines Art Center
6. Jody Pinto - Fairmont Park, Philadelphia
7. Anthony Gormley - Newcastle, England



1.



7.

6.







1.

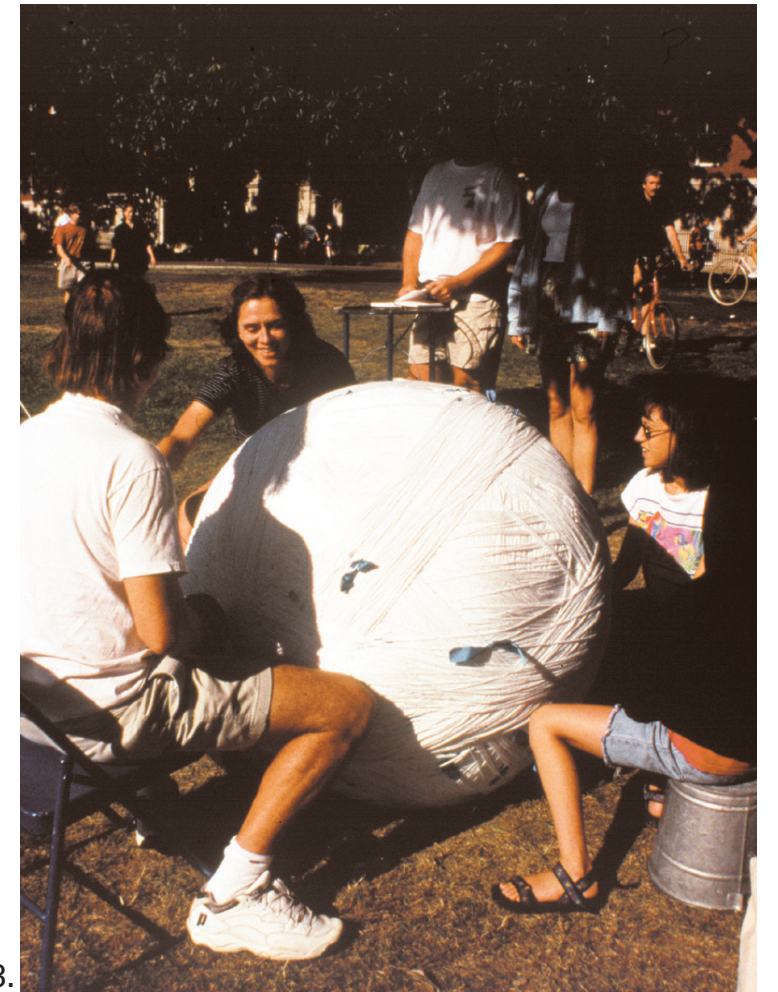


2.

## Temporary Art by Mags Harries and Lajos Héder

Temporary art projects should be sponsored for the Concord River Greenway to encourage people to visit the new trail. These projects might happen in different seasons. It is important that the trail not be littered with art and that artists should work with the materials on site, or if other materials are used that sites should return to their original state.

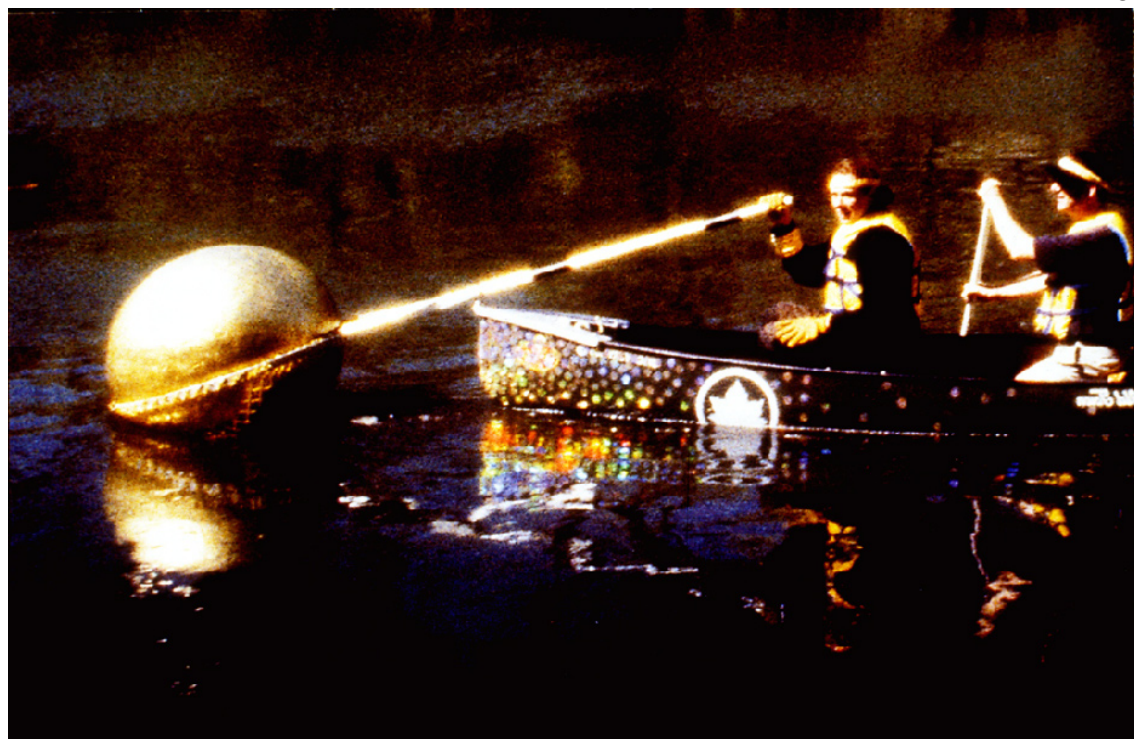
- 1-2. "Kenduskeag Roots" Kenduskeag Stream - Bangor, Maine
- 3. "Winding Down the Charles River" - Cambridge, MA
- 4. "The Cochituate Aqueduct Built by the 2nd Little Pig" - Newton, MA
- 5-6. "The Bronx River Golden Ball" - New York City, a multiple-year event to reclaim the river



3.



4.



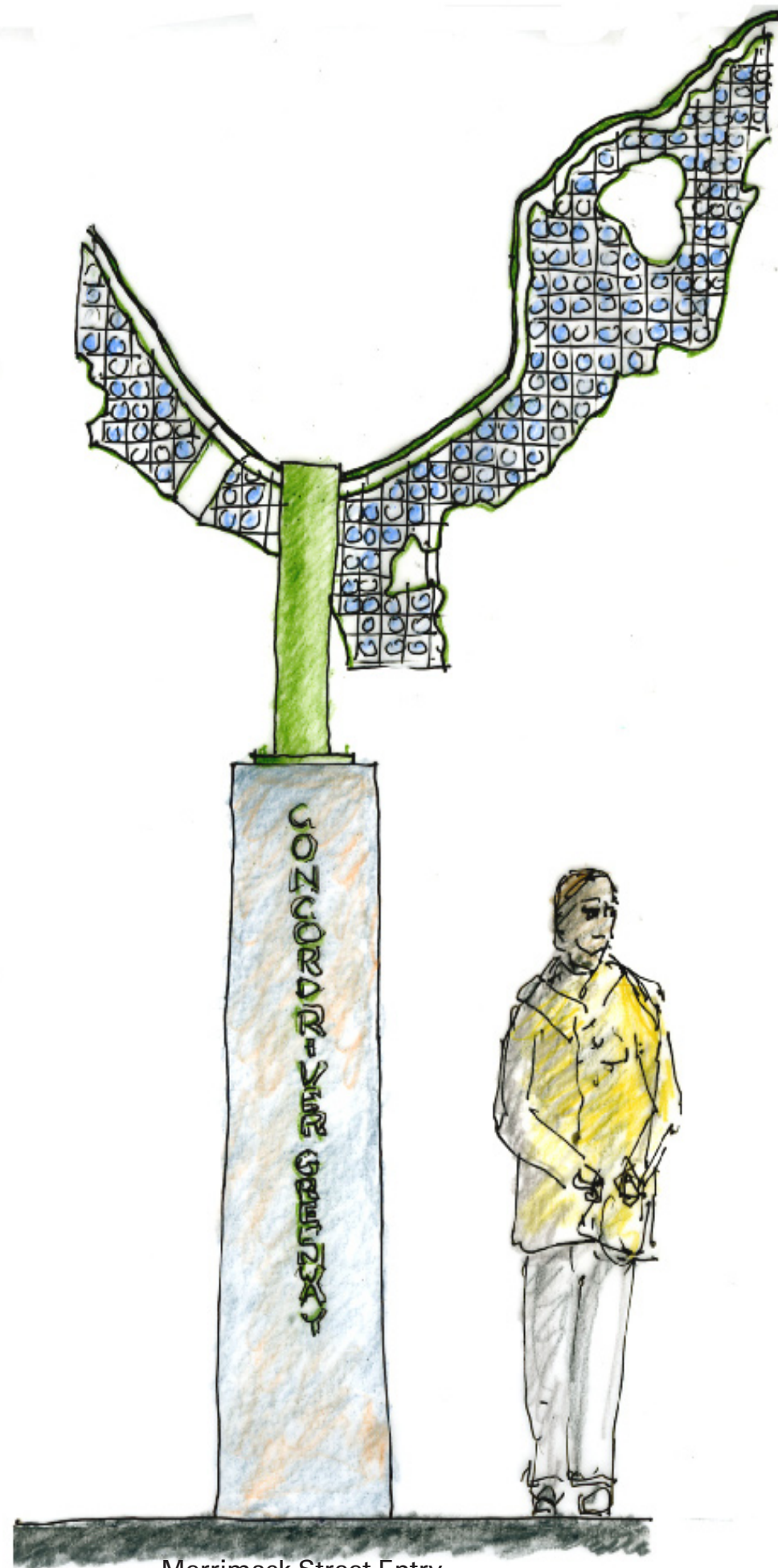
6.



5.



1.



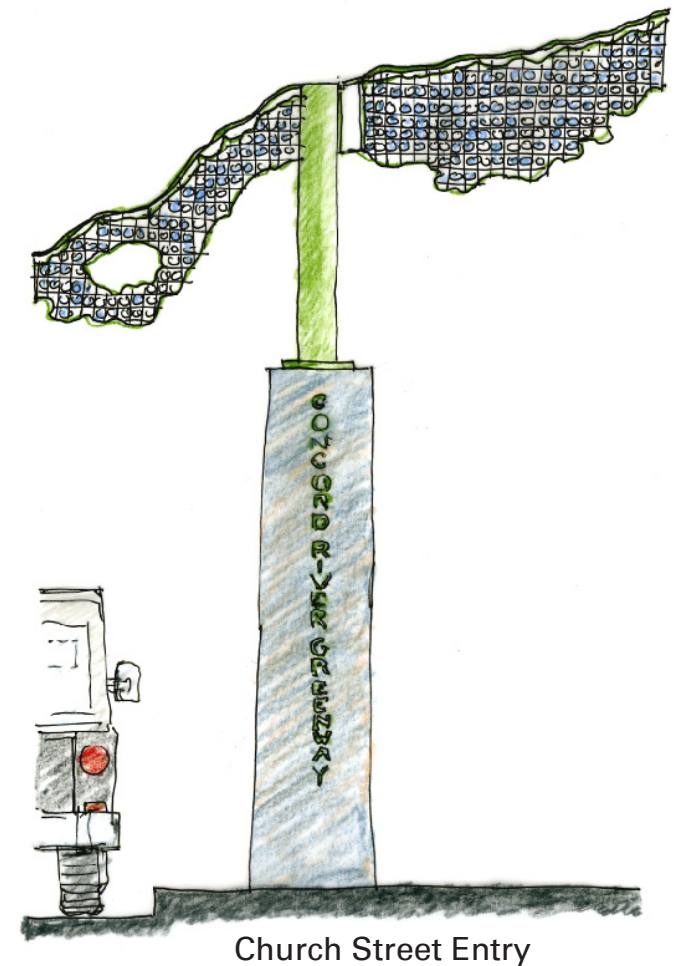
Merrimack Street Entry

2.



Rogers Street Entry

3.



Church Street Entry

## Trail Entry Markers

Locate at the 4 major cross streets,  
place near edge of sidewalk

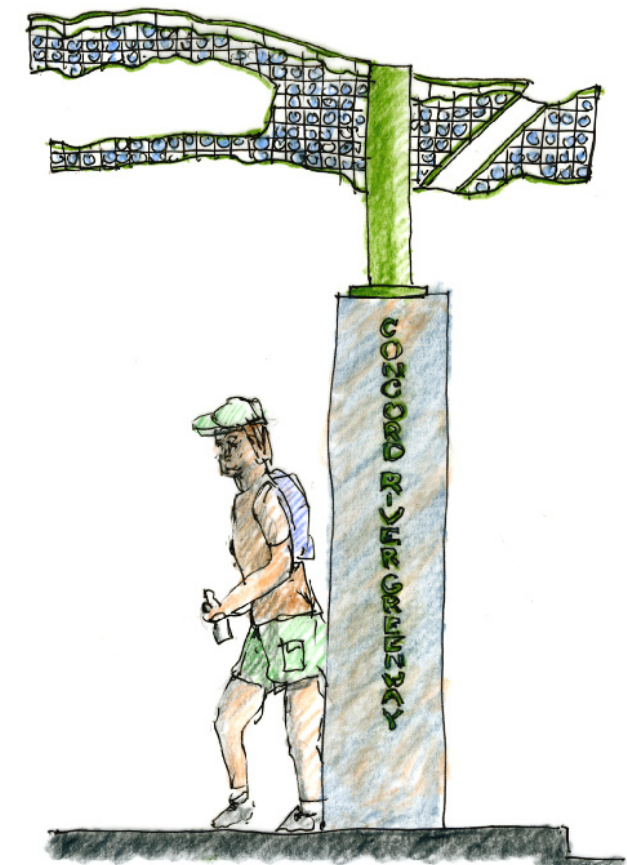
Sign shaped like the part of the  
River near the cross street

Color galvanized structural steel  
frame

Use Solar Ray Eyecatcher Disks  
suspended in steel grid that reflect  
sun and sky and move in the wind

Mount on square granite columns

4.

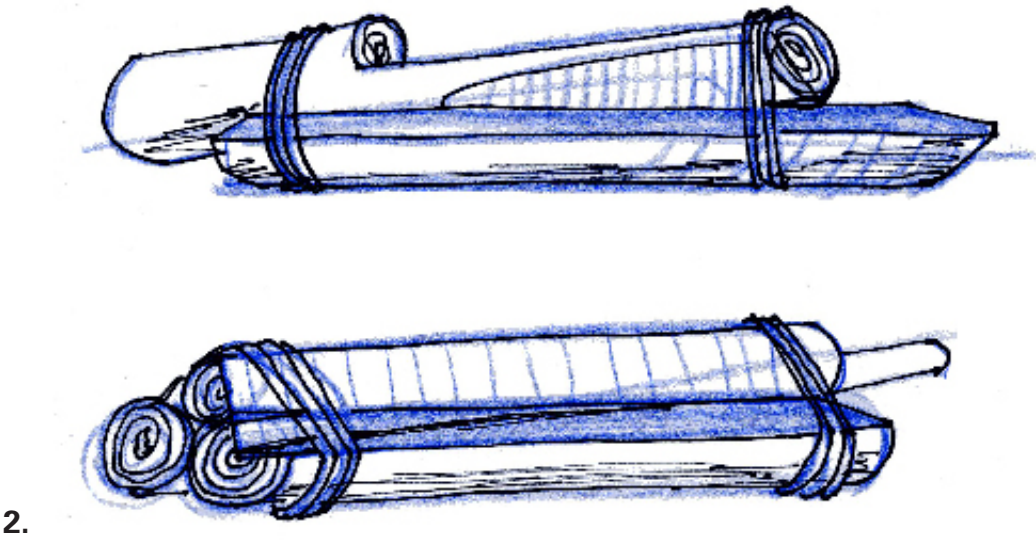


Lawrence Street Entry

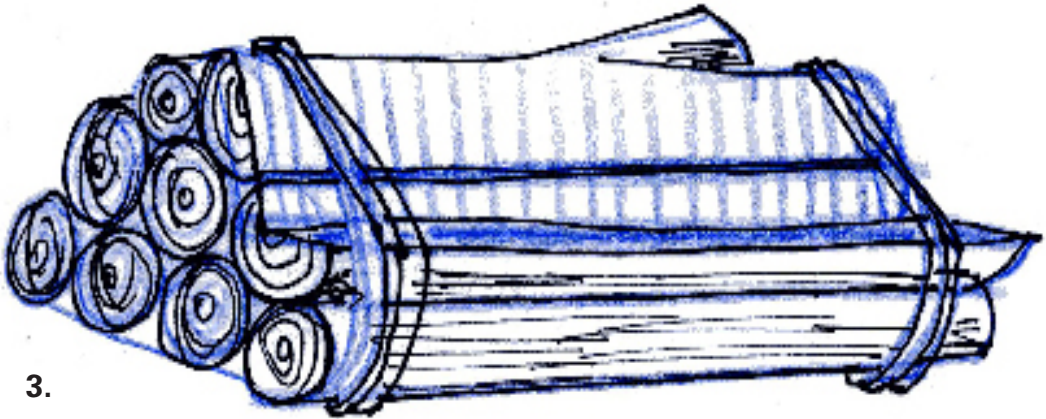


Seating Along the Path Using the Trees Cut Down from the Trail

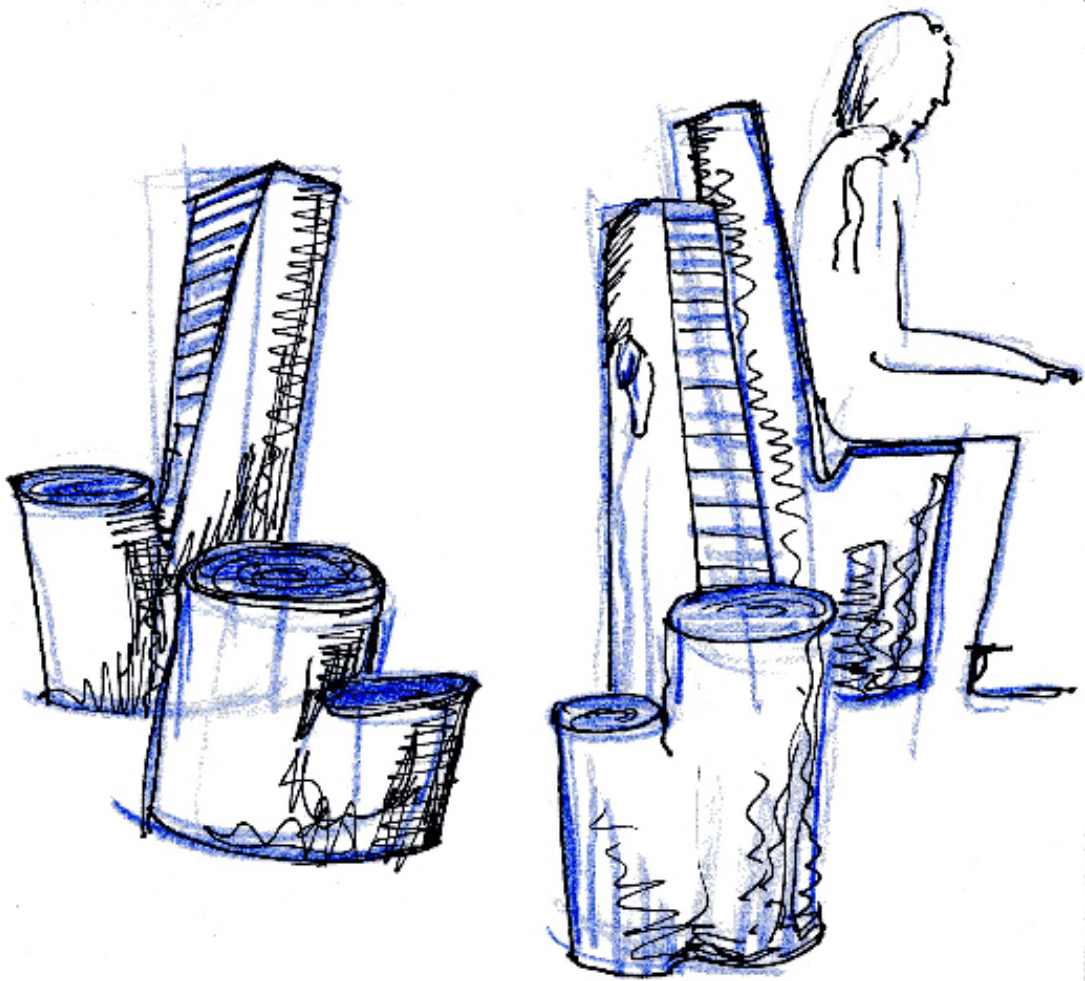
Reminder of the Trail construction  
Chain sawed and banded  
3-5 year life span



2.



3.



1.

4.





## Seating Along the River

Located at special points at the river bank, carving and building with local stone create intimate seating at multiple sites.

1. Fishing spot at new bridge
2. Carved native stone seating
3. River Amphitheater made of existing granite blocks



1.

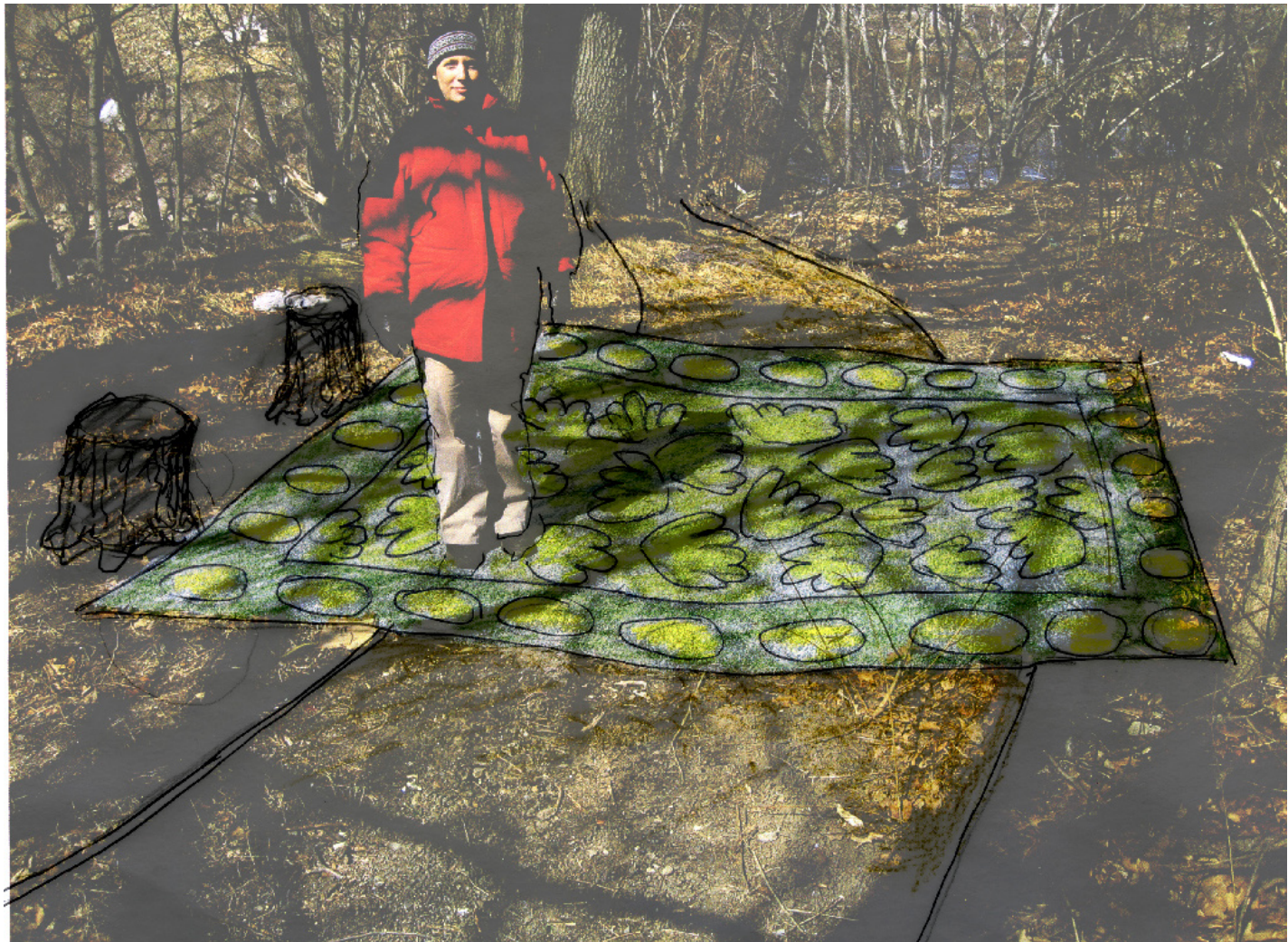


2.





Stopping, looking, resting points along main Trail



1. "Carpet" of pavers and tree trunk seats in the woods along Main Trail

Lookout near Fish Ladder and Falls built over existing retaining walls with rail, "carpet" of pavers, shaped and rough granite



2.



Island Overlook

The Island near the trail is the last wild area near Downtown. Remnants of concrete walls and crossing structures still exist. A light bridge over the rapids and a small overlook at the Island will make a magical viewing point as well as a great fishing spot



1. View from the Trail toward the Island



2. Side view of the bridge over the Rapids



Re-using industrial remnants as art

Cast tree trunks set into weathered concrete platform raises questions about the complex history of natural and man-made elements in the area



1.

New frame and stainless steel mirrors over existing river structure will frame and reflect these structures and accent their relationship to the River



3.

Concrete utility structure with added stairs and rails can become a viewing platform and a performance space



2.



Art of seasonal events



1.

Marker of high flood water level in woods evokes the dramatic differences among the different states of the River

A light steel frame set at the waterfall will be almost invisible in the summer and will turn into a dramatic, ever changing ice sculpture in the winter.



2.



## Priorities for implementation:

This plan suggests a great number of ideas in order to stimulate and create excitement about the potential contributions of artists to the new Greenway. It is unlikely that funds will be raised to implement all of them, so it is important to set priorities.

The first priority has to be to get the alignment and design of the main trail right and insure the protection and enhancement of the aesthetic experience of the Concord River. The recommendations related to this are the most important part of this plan – If this part is done wrong, it cannot be fixed while most of the other art projects can be added when funding becomes available. Our recommendation is to include an artist or landscape architect sympathetic to the issues we raised and experienced with this type of design to be a full participant on the design team for the next phase of the work. This team member should be a separate entity from the engineering firm but have the mandate to work in close coordination as part of the design team.

Of the Opportunities for Artists we have some personal favorites, the ones that could be most essential and memorable and should have priority:

- The four signs at the major street intersections
- The Small Bridge to the Island Overlook by the rapids
- The River Amphitheater Seating
- The temporary seating along the Trail using trees cut during construction

## Resources for implementing the Public Art Plan:

We recommend that money be sought for both the permanent artworks and temporary art installations through the city, the state and local foundations.

Resources in the area:

The University of Massachusetts Art Department students can be a resource under the guidance of Faculty.

The Revolving Museum is very experienced with creating temporary events.

Recognized professional curators, who are residents of Lowell and are already involved with the Concord River Greenway could be asked to be advisors to help create guidelines, advise in grant writing and identify funding sources that would be interested in a proposal.

## Bibliography:

**The Re-Enchantment of Art** by Suzy Gablik published by Thames & Hudson 1992

**Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies** by Sue Spaid published by the Contemporary Art Center June 2002

**Balance Art and Nature** Revised edition written by John Grande published by Black Rose Books Ltd. 2003