9 The Millennium Park Effect
A Tale of Two Cities

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Over lunch one day in the mid-1980s, I asked Erwin Noll, editor of *The Progressive* why the arts were a low government funding priority in Wisconsin. I was a young administrator charged with the state’s Percent-for-art program and seeking counsel from a range of political advisors. The governor chaired the State Building Commission, which funded percent projects and approved artists’ proposals, and in his office he prominently displayed a portrait of Robert LaFollette, who founded the state’s Progressive Party in the 1920s. If the grassroots populism of that period inspired the governor, why did not he enthusiastically endorse public art, which by its intention and the process of its creation directly encourages public discourse? I hoped that Noll, editor of the magazine that has carried on the Progressive movement’s legacy since 1929, could enlighten me. Noll replied that while the founders of the party were committed to citizen participation and accessible government, their priorities were the health and welfare of the populace and addressing issues of social and economic justice. Then he said something that still reverberates—that Progressives believed the arts became important only after other needs were met and that the affluent classes should fund them.

Political culture and public art are intertwined. The political traditions of a place influence the public’s perception of what is appropriate and also their expectations of what is possible when it comes to government funding for the arts and especially public art. Even when they do not directly pay for it, federal, state and municipal units of government enact laws that proscribe our civic landscape and influence public art. From a city’s comprehensive plan, which defines patterns for land use and future growth and preserves areas for plazas, parks, and open space to federal laws requiring that public spaces meet codes for public safety and comply with the accessibility standards set forth in the Americans with Disabilities Act, government affects the context if not the form, of public spaces and public art.

Madison, Wisconsin has a unique political culture. Seat of government and home to the state’s leading university, Madison has a reputation as a liberal town. Many of the school’s graduates settle close-by, starting businesses that are spin-offs of university research or that cater to the highly educated populace. They frequently become involved in local politics. Paul
Soglin, student leader of anti-war activities in the 1960s, first became a city council member and then went on to serve as mayor for six terms, beginning in 1973, (just before his twenty-eighth birthday) off and on until 1997. Politics is a favorite pastime in Madison and everyone is invited, indeed expects, to play.

Recognizing that grassroots participation would be the key to public art planning for the city, the Placemaking Collaborative, including me, Christine Podas-Larson, and Cliff Garten, in 2001 authored The Public Art Framework and Field Guide for Madison, Wisconsin, a do-it-yourself guide. But change was afoot; while we were devising this planning tool, the Overture Center was under construction. Designed by architect Cesar Pelli and completed in 2004, the Center occupies one entire block of State Street, the city’s downtown commercial corridor connecting the State Capitol and the University of Wisconsin, and houses theaters, galleries and facilities for nine cultural organizations, including the Madison Symphony Orchestra and the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art. The Overture Center was funded entirely by private philanthropy—at $207 million it is the largest private gift in Madison’s history. The sole funders are W. Jerome Frautschi, founder of Webcrafters, the manufacturer of books for the country’s largest educational publishers, and his spouse, Pleasant Rowland Frautschi, the woman behind Pleasant Company and the creator of the American Girl doll empire, which had recently been sold to Mattel for $700 million. Since the early 1980s the Frautschis, who believe in the potential of the cultural arts and entertainment to revitalize downtown, have spent freely to make their vision a reality. Jerome Frautschi chairs the Overture Foundation, which oversees the disbursement of their donations, and shepherded the construction of the center that is now the core of the Madison Cultural Arts District.

Private generosity made possible the most significant cultural gift Madison has ever seen. The individual arts institutions and organizations would not have dreamed of nor been able to mount such an ambitious capital campaign. In less than a decade, wealthy patrons with a bold vision and the funds to execute it changed the entire ecology of Madison’s arts community. Andrew Taylor who directs the University of Wisconsin’s Bolz Center, in 1969 the first business school program in the nation set up to train arts administrators, sees the arts as part of the urban ecosystem. He says they generate economic and social benefit by creating the street life and creative experiences that grow energized citizens. For an arts establishment to thrive, he believes it needs to show the ways it contributes to a community’s overall health. Arts organizations that are residents of the Overture Center now feel the added pressure of their status as economic generators.

Concurrent with the construction of the Overture Center, a second major urban design effort was underway, instigated by several downtown neighborhoods. They engaged the Urban Open Land Foundation (UOLF)—a private, non-profit organization whose mission is to create and revitalize public places and help communities retain quality open space networks, to lead the
planning process for a linear 18-acre parcel in a former rail corridor. The result was the Madison Central Park Concept Plan, which proposes a public plaza and farmer’s market; gardens with native plants; a performance stage and open lawn; and a bicycle plaza that would serve as a hub for trails in southern Wisconsin. Public art punctuates entry points and the junction of paths along the park’s five-block-length.

To further explore the potential for this new “central park,” on March 13, 2007 the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters’ public policy program sponsored “The Triumph of Millennium Park, and its Lessons for Public–Private Partnerships” at the Overture Center. Edward Uhlir, the director of design, architecture and landscape for Chicago’s fabulously successful park was invited to speak along with Madison Mayor David Cieslewicz. Uhlir told the audience of around 150 people that Millennium Park has changed the way Chicagoans feel about each other and has elevated the city’s self-esteem. Uhlir’s PowerPoint presentation emphasized that the park became a reality through the vision of Mayor Richard M. Daley and forward-thinking donors who partnered with the city. He described the evolution of the park and its performance venues, gardens and public art. In conclusion, he cited economic statistics touting the park’s beneficial effects on surrounding real-estate values and tourism revenues. But Uhlir was unaware of the occasion’s agenda until the Mayor spoke. Cieslewicz recognized that every great city has a great park and talked about the possibility of creating a new “central park” along an abandoned rail corridor downtown. He expressed the hope that “someday we may have something that rivals Millennium Park—at least in our own scale.”

What did Madison, with its participatory political culture and tradition of grass-roots involvement in public projects, hope to learn from the example of Millennium Park—a park largely designed and funded by private interests?

Situated just north of the Art Institute of Chicago and west of Grant Park and bounded by Michigan Avenue, Randolph Street, Columbus Drive and Monroe Street, Millennium Park is actually one of the world’s largest green roofs and part of Mayor Richard Daley’s incentives to turn Chicago into one of the most environmentally friendly cities in the United States. The 24.5-acre park is built over a railroad corridor and a 2,200-space parking garage. The park is a series of outdoor rooms that are filled with public art and cultural venues, including the Jay Pritzker Music Pavilion, the Harris Theater and the Lurie Garden but also a Bike Station to encourage bicycle commuting and a Welcome Center powered by solar energy.

I first experience the park on a ninety-five-degree Friday afternoon in June 2005, almost one year after its dedication. The Windy City feels like a blast furnace. The curvy glittering proscenium of Frank Gehry’s Pritzker Music Pavilion hovers above the trees, announcing the park. I enter the northwest corner at Washington Avenue and walk up an ornate staircase past the Millennium Monument in Wrigley Square, a classical Beaux-Arts peristyle incised with the roll call of donors. A distracting, shiny object visible through
the trees on my right—Kapoor’s Cloud Gate affectionately called “the bean” by Chicagoans—is a magnetically attractive work. The elliptical form rests upon two points and appears weightless, as if it just alighted on AT&T Plaza. But today the sculpture looks like a dirigible in a hangar; it is completely surrounded by a tent and inside metalworkers are sanding its seams. When I visit again in April 2007, the entire work is revealed, reflecting the sky and the horizon in a great arc on its mirror-like surface. People appear like ants as they hurry toward it and handprints smudge its pristine surface because touching the sculpture is irresistible.

I continue to ascend the stairs and arrive at an expanse of cool green lawn in front of the Pritzker Music Pavilion that is framed overhead by the latticework of the pavilion’s sound system. The Great Lawn measures 600 feet long by 300 feet wide and can accommodate over seven thousand concertgoers on folding chairs and blankets and 4,000 in the auditorium’s fixed seats. Security personnel in bright yellow t-shirts stand out as they eye to see people reclining on the lawn.

Behind the undulating curves of the pavilion’s façade, a cantilevered web of tubular steel supports the ribbon-like steel panels of the proscenium. I learn later that engineers that design amusement park roller coasters fabricated Gehry’s structure. East of the pavilion, Gehry’s 925-foot-long BP Pedestrian Bridge clad in shiny stainless steel panels snakes from the park over Columbus Drive and lands near a bedraggled rose garden in Grant Park. On the return trip, the bridge provides changing views of the downtown skyline, the park, and especially the pavilion. I feel as though I am within a sculptural space; movement through this functional form brings it to life.

Figure 9.1 Millennium Park, Chicago, Illinois. Credit: City of Chicago/Peter J. Schulz.
South of the Great Lawn, surrounded by a tall hedge, is the Lurie Garden by Kathryn Gustafson. Two-and-a-half acres in extent and constructed over a thin layer of soil only thirty inches to four feet deep, the garden draws its layout from the origins of the site. It is composed of two portions, the Light Plate and the Dark Plate, which are separated by the diagonal cut of the

Seam, a boardwalk along a shallow channel of moving water that follows the original line of the railroad’s trestle. When I visit the park two days late, on Sunday afternoon, crowds of people are seated on the wooden steps leading down to the water, cooling their feet in the stream. I follow the water-course to the south end of the garden and looking back, the hedge forms a horizon line anchoring the gleaming crown of the music pavilion visible just beyond. The Light Plate west of the Seam is carpeted with blooming drifts of over 130 varieties of native prairie and ornamental plants selected by Piet Oudolf. Across the Seam and up several steps between tawny limestone retaining walls, the wooded landscape of the Dark Plate features shady outdoor rooms. From this highpoint, the architectural tableau of downtown Chicago unfolds.

When I exit the garden’s southwest corner, I hear splashing water and waves of laughter. Past an allée of trees, a terrace overlooks the spectacle of the Crown Fountain by artist Jaume Plensa. Two 50-foot-tall glass block towers each containing 147 LED screens project a pair of gigantic faces across a 230-foot-long reflecting pool. Their eyebrows and facial muscles twitch, they blink and wet their lips, and after precisely five minutes they smile broadly and slowly purse their lips—and a torrent of water arcs out into the pool. Shrieking children in bathing suits elbow each other below. When the spigot is turned off, the children rush to line up against the walls of the towers and begin a countdown . . . three, two, one . . . and a waterfall from the top of the towers nearly knocks them off their feet. Then the cycle begins again with a new pair of faces. Adults and children mill about, cooling themselves in the shallow pool. The Crown Fountain is the most popular place in the park on this scorching day.

The wide, shadeless Chase Promenade and Boeing Galleries run north and south through the center of the park. These ramped connections provide unimpeded access to all levels of the park, unlike the ornate staircases that traverse the site from east to west. I avoid these areas on Friday but when I visit the park on Sunday when the weather is cooler I return to view an exhibition by local photographer Terry Evans, featuring images of Chicago from the air. I overhear many languages spoken among the groups examining Evan’s work, including Russian, Spanish, French and Japanese.

I observe the passing parade—an extended African-American family including grandmother, mother, father, two teenaged girls, and a young boy sits down to rest on a nearby bench. They are carefully dressed in their Sunday best and it is clear that this is a special outing. Two Indian women wearing vivid, sparkly saris chat amiably as their husbands trail behind. A security person on a Segway scooter zooms up to a pair of bicyclists peddling through the crowd and informs them that no bikes are allowed within the park. They are directed to the Bike Station at the park’s northeast corner to secure their bicycles. This building includes a multi-tier parking ramp for the storage of up to 300 bikes as well as locker rooms with showers. Solar panels
power the building and it has other energy-saving innovations such as toilets that conserve water.

Situated on the wide sidewalk at Michigan Avenue and Monroe Street, I discover the only seemingly improvised activity—tables covered with checkeredboard cloth and festooned with attention-getting whirligigs. On either side of the table, players of many ages and ethnicities are quietly absorbed in games of checkers or chess, oblivious to passersby. Also on this corner, a New Orleans–style brass band has set up, lending a festive air to my evening stroll. Street performers display special permits indicating their entertainment has been sanctioned by the city.

I visit for the second time in April, 2007, and the gleaming steel works by Kapoor and Gehry dominate the park through the leafless trees. The faces on the Crown Fountain, which is active 24 hours a day year-round, appear somber with the water turned off rather than gleeful or mischievous. But the colossal visages lend a benevolent human presence to the dull cityscape. The nearby chess tables are gone. Rules now prohibit ad-hoc vendors and performers in the park and they have had to relocate down the street. The Department of Cultural Affairs controls programming and hires musicians and other performers to circulate in the park and to entertain children in the free Family Tent.

The park’s final permanent public artwork, and the only piece by Chicago artists has been installed in the atrium of the Welcome Center on Randolph Street. Heliosphere, Biosphere, Technosphere by Patrick McGee and Adelheid Mers is composed of three nine-foot-diameter two-way mirrors mounted at right angles to each other overhead, on two walls and the ceiling in the building’s atrium. They reflect each other and the view of the sky out the window; the imagery etched on the mirrors overlaps with the changing, real-time atmospheric conditions. Solar energy is the subject of the artwork, and the building itself is clad with photovoltaic cells and generates most of its own energy.

Millennium Park with its innovative architecture and public art and technological marvels may be a park for the twenty-first century, but its social intentions are more like the great parks of the nineteenth century such as New York’s Central Park (1858–1880s) and Chicago’s South Parks including Jackson Park and Washington Park (1871 and 1894), all designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. These parks emphasized naturalistic design, passive recreation and genteel social interactions. With the exception of the boisterous activity around the Crown Fountain, Millennium Park is a place for strolling and quiet pursuits like a picnic on the Great Lawn, resting tired feet in the Lurie Garden’s stream or reclining under the shade trees edging the Chase Promenade and Boeing Galleries. I encountered few distressed children (or parents) during my visits. The park’s newness and cleanliness sets it apart as a special place and fosters an atmosphere of regard for others, even though a fleet of security personnel enforces it. This subdued setting presents ideal conditions for experiencing the park’s public art.
Mayor Daley conceived the idea for Millennium Park in 1997 while visiting his dentist whose office overlooks the unsightly garage deck, surface parking lots, and railroad cut between Michigan Avenue and Grant Park that would become the park.\(^8\) The parcel had remained substantially unimproved since 1836, when the Board of Canal Commissioners designated a soggy strip of land between the growing city center and Lake Michigan to be “Public Ground—A Common to Remain Open, Clear and Free of Any Buildings, or Other Obstruction, whatever” in order to avoid commercial development along the lake.\(^9\) Control of the undeveloped space was transferred to the city in 1844 and it was known as Lake Park or Lake Front Park for the next fifty years. But in 1852 the state gave the Illinois Central Railroad the right to use the land as a corridor to their freight terminal serving downtown industries in exchange for building a protective breakwater and a raised trestle to prevent Lake Michigan from flooding the land at the mouth of the Chicago River. The site was significantly enlarged in 1871 with charred fill from the Great Chicago Fire to include the railroad’s Grand Central Depot, and by 1890 the rail corridor’s right-of-way was thirteen hundred feet wide at Randolph Street, where Millennium Park is now located.

Legal rulings at the turn of the twentieth century set the course for the subsequent development of the site. In 1892 the United States Supreme Court ruled that the state of Illinois did not have the authority to grant lakefront water rights or control to the Illinois Central—this power belonged to the city “in trust for public use.” Under this decision, the city owned all of the filled land east of Michigan Avenue between Eleventh and Randolph streets, including the railroad right-of-way. Later, this ruling would be referenced to gain control of the land for Millennium Park that the railroad had been using for many years as surface parking lots. Attorney Randall Mehrberg, general counsel for the Chicago Park District, recognized the railroad was powerless to build anything on the site because they did not own air rights above the property, and, since they had abandoned rail operations, sued to terminate their easement. In December 1997, the railroad donated its rights, title, and interest in the property extending from McCormick Place to Randolph Street in exchange for a tax deduction and to boost their earnings and increase their sale price during a takeover bid by Canadian National Railway (Gilfoyle, 82). The railroad finally relinquished control of the lakefront after almost 150 years.

A series of lawsuits between 1890 and 1909 by mail-order magnate and Michigan Avenue property-owner Aaron Montgomery Ward invoked the edict to keep the park free of buildings. As Chicago began planning to host the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, the garbage and ugly wooden shanties occupying the lakefront offended Ward. While he and other adjacent property-owners did approve construction of the World’s Congresses Building that was used during the fair and later became the Art Institute of Chicago, the Illinois Supreme Court upheld Ward’s opposition to erecting the Field Museum of Natural History in the park. The Montgomery Ward
ruling established height restrictions effectively curtailing any sizable park structures over 40-feet-tall except band shells (two were constructed 1935–1970 and 1976–present) and a Beaux-Arts peristyle (1928–1953), and was referenced on several occasions during the design process for Millennium Park’s architecture and public art.

Another historical precedent influences Chicago architecture, city planning and park design to this day—the City Beautiful movement that grew out of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition. Daniel Burnham, of the Chicago firm Burnham and Root, was the Director of Works and led the fair’s ambitious architectural program. Although largely self-taught, Burnham promoted historical European models of architecture by commissioning McKim, Mead and White, and other architects who had trained at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. The legacy of the fair includes Jackson and Washington Parks, the Museum of Science and Industry, and City Beautiful-inspired proposals for lakefront development, including the Municipal Improvement League Plan (1895) and Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett’s utopian Plan of Chicago (1909). The City Beautiful movement appealed to Chicago’s civic elite because they believed the institutions of government, literature, art, and culture could serve as the common ground for harmonizing individual and class interests, and the neoclassical style associated with the movement visibility emphasized order and control (Gilfoyle, 25). The Plan of Chicago advocated the creation of a viable civic center for the city, and between 1917 and 1929, Burnham and his partners oversaw the design of Grant Park, a key component of the plan, in the style of the French Renaissance and constructed the park’s centerpiece, Buckingham Fountain.

After his illuminating experience at the dentist’s office, Mayor Daley put plans in motion for the park. Since assuming office in 1989 his administration had made arts, culture, and entertainment a centerpiece of development and tourism and had encouraged and subsidized a downtown cultural renaissance, including the renovation of Navy Pier; the redesign of Soldier Field and an integrated Museum Campus connecting attractions in Grant Park, including the Shedd Aquarium, the Field Museum, and Adler Planetarium. An empowered Department of Cultural Affairs, housed in the Chicago Cultural Center across Michigan Avenue from Millennium Park, has become one of the city’s most popular agencies, and mounts exhibitions and events in their building and throughout the city; sponsors and coordinates music festivals in the parks; and administers the Chicago Percent-for-Art Program.

On March 30, 1998, Daley launched the Lakefront Millennium Project as a public-private partnership with John Bryan, the retired CEO of the Sara Lee Corporation, as chief fundraiser. Daley asked Bryan to raise $30 million from the private sector. A passionate long-term arts supporter, Bryan had served on the board of trustees of the Chicago Symphony and the Art Institute of Chicago, and during his tenure at Sara Lee the corporation was awarded the National Medal of Arts for its altruistic corporate policies. But most important, Bryan had an incomparable knowledge of why rich people—such
as himself—actually want to give money to things and also understood that
people asked to give money want and expect to get involved in the details of
initial planning.  

Bryan at first adopted Burnham and Bennett’s early-twentieth-century
City Beautiful ideas for the lakefront as an artistic composition set forth in
the Plan of Chicago. The venerable Chicago firm Skidmore, Owings, Mer-
rill LLC (SOM) was hired to produce a master plan, which was later altered
because it slavishly adhered to Burnham and Bennett’s model and wasn’t for-
ward-looking enough for the donors. With its series of staircases, the design
also presented serious accessibility issues. Although SOM’s master plan was
extensively reworked, it established the general scheme for the park as a series
of outdoor rooms that extended Grant Park’s gridded parterres. SOM con-
ceived the entrances and exits, the promenade, the skating rink, the location
of the fountains, the peristyle, the Great Lawn, the garden, and the music
pavilion as a unit. The parking garage was a key component of their plan.
Requiring a public investment of $120 million in municipal bonds, it would
be both the financial and structural support for the park—at conception, the
Lakefront Millennium Project was as much a transportation project as it was
a new park space (Gilfoyle, 88).

But how would the park amenities, including public art atop this struc-
ture, be funded? Bryan formed the Millennium Park Board of Directors with
Donna LaPietra of Kurtis Productions as his cochair and included corporate
officials such as Marshal Field V who had experience in civic and cultural
affairs. Then Bryan devised a strategy to identify individuals, families, and
corporations with historic attachments to Chicago and to ask them to each
contribute a gift in excess of $5 million to develop a space in the park to which
they would have naming rights. He convinced Marshall Field V to lead a drive
for smaller gifts of $1-million, and these donors’ names would be inscribed on
a peristyle in the northwest corner of the park—a roll call of Chicago’s “mod-
ern-day Medicis,” according to Donna LaPietra (Gilfoyle, 104). But to attract
donors Millennium Park had to be original and unique, and Bryan decided
that significant works of public art, historically an important component in
downtown Chicago’s urban design, would be the answer. Beginning in 1978
Chicago’s Percent-for-Art ordinance incorporated public art into municipal
building programs, and by the 1990s the Loop featured over one hundred
works of public art in corporate plazas and lobbies as well as in city-owned
spaces and buildings, and included the famous Chicago Picasso.

On July 10, 1998, Bryan convened the Millennium Park Art Committee,
including art collector Lew Manilow, Michael Lash (director of the city’s
public art program), and gallery director of the city’s public art program,
and gallery director Richard Gray, among others. Gray relates that the art
selection process soon reached an impasse because the committee members
had conflicting aesthetic interests, and he suggested empowering officials
from the Art Institute to make recommendations. They asked Jeremy Strick,
Curator of Modern Art, to assemble a list of world-renowned artists and he
brought slides of their work to the committee (Gilfoyle, 112). The committee had considered and rejected the idea of a competition because they felt there should not be a public process on art and did not want the public voting on it, although later they did bring their selections to the city’s Public Art Committee for review and comment. They also decided to commission two sculptures rather multiple pieces of art, one to be located in the garden across from the Art Institute and another for the central plaza near the skating rink, and invited proposals from artists Jeff Koons and Anish Kapoor.

Bryan also formed an architecture committee to determine the design and purpose of the park’s music pavilion, and a group to address the creation of the garden south of it. In August, 1998, Edward Uhlir, former Parks District architect, engineer, and planner, and member of the Mayor’s Public Art Committee, was lured out of retirement by the Mayor to be Millennium Park’s design director and project manager. Uhlir joined the architecture committee, which was debating how to make an artistic statement with a band shell, when they hit upon the idea of commissioning Frank Gehry to design it. Committee member Cindy Pritzker, whose family owns the Hyatt Hotel chain and the Marmon Group and endows the annual Pritzker Prize in Architecture, was particularly enthusiastic about Gehry’s work and pledged $15 million for the music pavilion. Uhlir and committee member James Feldstein were dispatched to Los Angeles to convince Gehry to design it. Gehry listened patiently as Uhlir described the unique possibilities of the site but became more interested when he talked about the pedestrian bridge connecting Millennium Park to Grant Park over Columbus Avenue. Gehry, who had never designed a pedestrian bridge, was intrigued and when Feldstein said that they were approaching him with the Pritzker family’s blessing, Gehry agreed to design the pavilion and the bridge. Securing Gehry was a defining moment for the project—the integrated ensemble of the music pavilion and its Great Lawn and the pedestrian bridge are the most significant elements of the park—and transformed it from a transportation and infrastructure project into a “world-class cultural attraction that no other city has” in the words of Mayor Daley (Gilfoyle, 118).

Meanwhile, Koons proposed a 150-foot tower for the central plaza with a kitschy motif of children’s toys. Built of a variety of materials, it featured a spiraling water slide that could be used by the public. Kapoor presented a model in December, 1998 for a gleaming, 150-ton, 60-foot-long and 30-foot-high elliptical metal sculpture for the garden, which would reflect the sky and its surroundings. Park visitors would be able to walk under it. Committee member Cindy Pritzker objected to Koons’s proposal, as did Mayor Daley. Uhlir remarks that the artist’s design was ill-conceived and impossible to build, and the tower would have been taller than anything in the park and most buildings on Michigan Avenue. Kapoor’s magical sculpture was favorably received. However, garden committee members questioned the relationship between Kapoor’s work and the traditional garden by landscape designer Deborah Nevins, which conformed to SOM’s Beaux-Arts master plan. The
sculpture also would have been in close proximity with Gehry’s pavilion. “It just didn’t work,” said Michael Lash, because it conflicted with Gehry’s pavilion, which was seen by some committee members as “a giant piece of sculpture” (Gilfoyle, 121). The situation grew messy when Gehry expressed reservations about the Nevins-designed garden, and its donors also grew disenchanted and withdrew their financial commitment in April, 2000.

Bryan suggested starting over with the garden design and then his art committee boldly decided against Koons’s proposal and moved Kapoor’s work from the garden to the central plaza facing Michigan Avenue. Outside the garden and off-axis from the pavilion was the logical place for Kapoor’s sculpture, where it could have some breathing room and reflect the city’s architectural gems across the street. Kapoor agreed the open plaza was a better site and requested no lighting in proximity to the work and minimal landscaping around it. However, the engineers had to redesign the parking garage to support its weight in this location.

The garden would now have its own identity but was in need of a designer. Its committee decided to conduct a two-stage international competition, the most open competition for any of the park’s enhancements. Bryan composed an eleven-member jury including La Pietra, Lash, James N. Wood, (President, the Art Institute of Chicago), directors of Boston’s Morton Arboretum and the Chicago Botanic Gardens, and several architects. Uhlir wrote the prospectus, which was issued on July 17, 2000, inviting eighteen landscape architects, garden designers, and planning firms to prepare initial designs for a forward-looking garden that would provide a contrast and complement to the scale and character of Grant Park, and a year-long floral display unique to the region and different from other Chicago venues. From eleven responses, three projects were chosen for further development—Millennium Garden by the office of Dan Kiley, who had designed the Chicago Art Institute South Garden in 1962; Urban Riff Garden by Jeff Mendoza Gardens; and The Shoulder Garden by the team of Kathryn Gustafson Partners with master plantsman Piet Oudolf and theatrical lighting designer Robert Israel.

The Shoulder Garden was unanimously endorsed by the jury, which found it “bold, intellectual, daring, and cutting-edge” and the only entry enhanced by the presence of visitors because it invites them to occupy its spaces in a series of staged theatrical relationships. But Bryan and his committee had difficulty locating a donor for the garden because a gift twice the original estimate of $5 million was now required to build the winning design. Finally, in May 2003, a new sponsor was secured—Ann Lurie, who directs a foundation established with her late husband Robert Lurie’s fortune from Equity Group Investments—agreed to the $10-million endowment necessary for the garden. Bryan now had sponsors for all of the park’s major enhancements.

While conflicts and escalating costs grabbed the attention of media, planners and city officials, one of the most important events in the evolution of the park slipped under the radar. On December 9, 1999, project manager Ed Uhlir presented the design for Gehry’s music pavilion to the City’s Public
Art Committee. The committee was authorized to evaluate publicly funded Percent-for-Art projects, but the art in Millennium Park technically did not fall under their purview because it was funded completely by private donors. Only Uhlir recognized the gravity of the meeting—the pavilion’s prominent metal ribbons that cantilevered out over the audience and extended upward to a height of 130 feet violated the Montgomery Ward height restrictions for buildings in Grant Park (Gilfoyle, 178). Uhlir claimed the pavilion was really a piece of sculpture, and if the Public Art Committee recognized it as art then he would have a useful argument should the Plan Commission question its appropriateness. “We were just getting unofficial endorsement,” Uhlir said afterward. No minutes document this meeting but Uhlir says that the committee loved the design and supported it unanimously, agreeing that the decorative elements above the proscenium were not “structures” but “art” (Gilfoyle, 181). The SOM master plan had gone through a lengthy review process including public debate and input leading to final approval by the Plan Commission in May, 1998, but no official ever requested another hearing. Instead, administrative staff reviewed the addition of Gehry’s pavilion and concurred that the design was consistent with the original (SOM) plan (Gilfoyle, 180).

The fountain in the park funded by the Lester Crown family is the only work of public art that was not chosen and designed through Millennium Park officials and committees. The family, who are the largest shareholders of General Dynamics, gave their funding commitment early, in December 1999, and were involved through all phases of the project. They solicited artists through an informal competition, and because they are active in real estate development and familiar with all aspects of construction, they also participated in the design and engineering of the artwork. First, the Crowns asked Bob Wislow of U.S. Equities Realty (who later managed the construction of the fountain, music pavilion, bridge, and Anish Kapoor’s sculpture) to compile a list of artists and architects. Plensa was not on this list but was recommended to Wislow by attorney and art collector Jack Guthman. Wislow showed Susan Crown almost a thousand images of public art from around the world, and the family selected Plensa, Maya Lin, and architect Robert Venturi and invited them to present concepts. The Crown family wanted a work that would appeal to families and children and were most impressed with Plensa’s proposal.

Plensa has remarked that good art challenges the viewer to interact with it, to question tradition and preconceptions, and generates “an exchange of energy” (Gilfoyle, 282). His design for the Crown Fountain accomplishes these aims using twenty-first century technology. The towers project video close-ups of 1000 Chicago residents, who were filmed for Plensa by students from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. According to Plensa, the changing images will enable the fountain to evolve and become a visual archive of the city. Chicago Tribune architecture critic Blair Kamin remarks that “Plensa’s democratic move of glorifying not the leader but the common person inverts
the convention of rulers and gods being divine and makes the human beings
divine—on the LED screens and on the plaza itself.”

Although the Crown Fountain is arguably the work most beloved by the
public—children flock to it in the steamy summer months and crowds gather
to observe the ongoing spectacle—when Plensa initially presented the scale
model in 2002, it was met with criticism and opposition. Art Institute presi
dent James Wood felt the glass towers were too tall and others worried the
digital technology would become outmoded. Mayor Daley was concerned
the spectacular lighting would “Disneyfy” that part of the park, giving it a
glitzy Times Square feel (Gilfoyle, 290). In a letter to John Bryan, Michael
Lash was most critical, objecting to the height and scale of the project and
contending that it intended to “one-up” Kapoor’s work (Gilfoyle, 291). Kamin has observed the work over several seasons and disagrees. He says,
“the towers are perfectly scaled in their verticality to the ‘cliff’ of buildings
on Michigan Avenue and the LED light endows the sculpture with color and
a sense of warmth that are absent from the classical pieces in the park and
even Cloud Gate, especially in winter.”

At Millennium Park’s dedication on July 16, 2004, Mayor Daley was able
to proclaim that the park was built and would be maintained at no cost to
regular taxpayers because the income from the parking garage under it and
the northern portion of Grant Park was anticipated to cover the city’s investment
in its construction. This point was significant because from a master
plan by SOM in 1998 for a 16.5-acre park anticipated to cost $150 million, design and construction expenses had escalated to $475 million with an
increase in the total area of the park to 24.5 acres and the addition of stellar
architecture and public art. Gehry’s pavilion, trellis and bridge came in at
$75.8 million; Plensa’s Crown Fountain cost $17 million; Kapoor’s Cloud
Gate was $23 million including the structural reinforcement for the plaza;
and the Lurie Garden cost $10 million including its endowment for upkeep. Of the final $475 million price tag, the city’s commitment to infrastructure
was kept within the $270 million budgeted including $95 million from the
special property tax assessed in the Central Loop Tax Increment Financing
District and $175 million in limited tax bonds issued by the City of Chicago.
In December 2006, this debt was retired early when the city negotiated a
lucrative 99-year lease with a private garage operator and investment com-
pany for the garages under Grant and Millennium Parks. Private gifts that
continue to come in presently amount to $240 million, including more than
$1 million each from 115 individuals, corporations and foundations. A gala
event for donors before the public opening of the park netted an additional
$3 million toward the park’s endowment for ongoing maintenance.

Despite the cost overruns and delays, Uhlir declares that the park was
worth the wait and effort because it has become an economic dynamo for the
central business district. Writing for the Economic Development Journal in
Spring, 2005, he states that, “the ‘Bilbao effect’ is causing local and regional
governments everywhere to look at innovative and unusual architecture to lure
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the tourist dollar. We now consider our new park to have a similar impact—the “Millennium effect”—although Chicago has much more to offer than Bilbao.”

Seven new condominium projects attribute their successful sales to their proximity to the park and a study released in April 2005 calculates that the economic impact over the next ten years on the adjacent real estate market that is directly attributable to Millennium Park will total $1.4 billion. South Michigan Avenue has lacked the cachet of North Michigan Avenue’s “Magnificent Mile,” but the “Cultural Mile” created by the park and the nearby theater district is expected to generate from $428.5 million to $586.6 million for hotels, from $672.1 million to $867.1 million for restaurants, and between $529.6 million and $711.1 million for retailers over the next ten years. In the first six months after Millennium Park opened, over two million people visited. Yearly visitation is expected to be in excess of three million and total visitor spending from 2005 to 2015 is anticipated to range between $1.9 billion and $2.6 billion. Priceline.com handles internet reservations for hotel rooms, and they report that of the top fifty destinations for Summer 2006, Chicago’s Millennium Park was the most requested destination.

The Millennium Park project energized a trend of public–private partnerships that has increasingly impacted the direction of the city’s public art program. While primarily charged with administering the Percent-for-Art ordinance that sets aside 1.33% of municipal construction and renovation costs for public art, the program also facilitates collaborations between government agencies, the private sector and other sponsors. In 2006, Cindy Ritzier approached the program after she had raised $1.2 million to bring to Chicago thirty indoor and outdoor pieces by Niki de Saint Phalle that she had seen in Atlanta. The Chicago Public Art Program worked with Pritzker and the parks and tourism departments to install the temporary exhibition at the Garfield Park Conservatory. The program also coordinates outdoor exhibitions for the Boeing Galleries, a linear north-south promenade in Millennium Park, and is working with Mark di Suvero on an exhibition of his sculptures for this space. But Gregory Knight, Deputy Commissioner/Visual Arts at the Department of Cultural Affairs says that since Millennium Park, “it has become more difficult to introduce indigenous ideas and projects that are ‘Chicago focused’ and to avoid (the pressure of) taking on projects that have been done by other cities.”

Civic projects with the scope and ambition of Millennium Park need champions and it is unlikely that a government body could have taken the bold action necessary to enable the creation of the park and its public art. Knight points out that the city’s funding for the Public Art Program does not even come close and that, “the deep pockets of (Millennium Park’s) donors buried the cost overruns . . . if the public art program were run this way, it would be a scandal.” As the scope of the park and the quality of its landscape, art and architecture grew, so did its cost and John Bryan was uniquely positioned to motivate the private donors to increase their financial commitments.
The park began with a master plan which was approved by the city’s Plan Commission but which changed as the donors’ demands influenced it. John Bryan marshaled the many committees that controlled the selection of architects and artists and the park’s design flexed to accommodate the donors’ ideas. Stakeholder status was conferred upon donors by virtue of their monetary investment. The Mayor remained closely involved in the process, and several presentations were made to the city’s Public Art Committee as plans for the art and architecture evolved, but the revised plans were not resubmitted to the Plan Commission. The Millennium Park Board of Directors operated with an unusual degree of autonomy that was often questioned by the local media.26

Madison’s Central Park differs from Millennium Park in many respects but most notably because its conceptual plan was developed through the exhaustive public process that characterizes the city’s political culture. A park for that location had been talked about since the 1970s and finally, in 2005, a preliminary plan was endorsed by the Common Council. A few days after Uhlir’s presentation at the Overture Center in Spring, 2007, Mayor Cieslewicz announced 12 community leaders would comprise the Central Park Design and Implementation Task Force. The committee will work with the preliminary plan and includes former Madison Mayor Joe Sensenbrenner and Nancy Ragland, the retired director of the Olbrich Botanical Gardens, a popular private institution that has a partnership with the city. Politicians, business leaders, directors of nonprofits, and neighborhood representatives round out the group. Sensenbrenner, who is also board president of the UOLF, said that “one aim of the committee will be achieving the correct balance between public support and private inspiration.” The public-private partnership was critical to the success of Millennium Park in Chicago, he added.27 Absent are representatives from the arts community.

The Task Force is grappling with whether their park is a local or a regional park and whom it should serve. Mark Olinger, Director of the Department of Planning and Development, staffs the committee for the city and remarks that “the park is in need of a compelling vision. I’m not sure that there is common agreement about what the park is and (as a consequence) the project has not gained traction with the local philanthropic community.”28 Olinger believes that the arts community will eventually become involved because public art is prominently featured in the park’s conceptual scheme.29 Millennium Park never had such an identity crisis—from the beginning, the Board recognized that their site was the finest piece of undeveloped real estate left in Chicago and that they did not want to put an ordinary park on that piece of land (Gifffoyle, 105). They aimed to attract an international roster of the most creative artists and architects in the world at the time of the millennium to design different elements of the park.

Before the Overture Center, Madison’s major civic projects developed over time, in phases, not only because of the sporadic availability of funds but also as befits the grassroots model, which requires widespread public support for
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a project to gain momentum. The ongoing redesign of the Capitol Square and State Street passing in front of the Overture Center exemplifies this process. The Public Art Framework and Field Guide of 2001 called for teams applying to the Department of Planning and Development for the project to include an artist. Wallace, Roberts, Todd LLC, of Philadelphia, and artist Brad Goldberg of Dallas, were chosen to develop the master plan for the eight-block-long street. In working sessions with government officials, business stakeholders, and concerned members of the public including many local artists, the design team produced ideas for public art at three pocket parks and granite paving along the street’s length with incised quotes from Wisconsin literary luminaries such as conservationist Aldo Leopold.

After the master plan, the project went through another phase with a series of open competitions. A team of local designers including sculptor Jill Sebastian of Milwaukee detailed the overall plan for the streetscape, and others were chosen to design specific elements such as bus shelters and fountains. In 2004 Sebastian created The Philosopher’s Grove in the first block near the Capitol Square, featuring a human-scaled ensemble of cylindrical granite forms that erupt from the pavement at dynamic angles. The forms comprise seats and tables and are situated in a grove of trees. Sebastian often collaborates with writers, and she laid out a process to select literary quotes to etch on the granite forms, but this component of her design remains to be fully funded through the city’s modest public art allowance. As construction proceeds down the street, additional granite seating ensembles have been replicated under her supervision. When funding is secured, Sebastian will complete the work by handling the writing for the entire length of the street like an anthology. State Street is being constructed as funding becomes available through Tax Incremental Financing, federal funds and property assessments; but with many designers and a twelve-year timeframe for completion, there is also the danger of compromise and loss of focus. Some portions of the design may never be completed. In contrast, Millennium Park emerged full-blown after a six-year period of concentrated fundraising, design and construction.

Ed Uhlir, who has stayed on to become the executive director of Millennium Park, Inc., has spoken with civic groups from San Francisco to Boston, which, like Madison, have been impressed with the park’s effects upon economic development and tourism. These cities see the park as part of an urban planning trend that believes arts and culture are critical to attracting the “creative class” that makes regions economic winners. With the Overture Center, Madison joined this trend. But the city appears interested in the Millennium Park model for Central Park primarily because of its public–private funding mechanism (its means) rather than its ends (a focus upon cultural venues and public art). Central Park was initiated by the neighborhoods through UOLF, a private nonprofit organization, and like Millennium Park, it will only happen if it is mostly privately funded. If it is built, the city will consider taking it on only if it has an operating endowment. Olinger muses, “What management, ownership, and maintenance model will make it go? The example of Olbrich
Botanical Gardens (a public–private partnership) presents one possibility. But Central Park will be different than our other city parks. It may have its own board, executive director, and city employees assigned to it—and it will need other sources of revenue.”

Taxpayer resistance to government spending has become a problem for American cities. After two decades of federal disinvestment and local budget cutting, many cities have difficulty maintaining what they have and mayors are left with few choices for funding ambitious new projects. It is increasingly clear that municipal governments lack the financial resources and the power to govern without the support of private groups. Millennium Park fundraiser John Bryan has said that in the past, he’s been in favor of government support for the arts but he has never made a crusade of it. Now he believes that, “our cultural organizations and facilities are better off managed by the private sector than the public sector.” Ed Uhlir admits that, “Millennium Park wouldn’t have happened if it wasn’t for the private sector really wanting to create something for the public.” (Gilfoyle, 350.)

How important is the process or the means that led to the creation of Millennium Park? The result is a park that is open to the public without fee, whose programming and maintenance have been endowed at little cost to taxpayers—and a park that, by many accounts, people love. In a democracy, history and process matter. But what if there is no political will to maintain the public domain? Millennium Park poses a conundrum not only because it is outside of the practice of public art that endeavors to involve the public in aesthetic decision making and to create work through an interaction with them, but also because the donors’ largesse bought widespread influence. The true Millennium Park effect will be revealed as our nation’s public realm becomes increasingly privately funded.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 9

1. John Allen, “Madison’s Magnum Opus, With the opening of the $205 million Overture Center, downtown looks to stage a creative comeback,” WISCONSIN 15 no. 3 (Fall 2004), 24.
2. Ibid., 27.
5. Derby, “Mayor Has ‘Great Park’ In Mind.”
9. This brief history of the site is drawn from Gilfoyle’s excellent book and also an architectural tour of the site led by docent Nancy Karen of the Chicago Architectural Foundation, June 26, 2005.
15. Ibid, 15.
31. Richard Florida, The Rise of the Creative Class and how it’s transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life. (New York: Basic Books, 2002). Florida argues that regional economic growth is driven by the locational choices of creative people and they prefer places that are diverse, tolerant and open to new ideas. He devised a “Creativity Index” that mixes four equally weighted factors: the share of the workforce in the creative class based upon census data; innovation as measured as patents per capita; high-tech industry using the Milken Institute’s Tech Pole Index; and diversity as measured by the Gay Index. Of the 268 regions sampled in Florida’s Creativity Index, Madison ranked 20th overall, ahead of Chicago at 29th.