

CALL FOR PUBLIC ART DRAWS HUGE RESPONSE



The interior of the Vertical Circulation building, seen in the foreground of the above drawing, will be the site of one public art project.

by Leslie Watson

On September 30 the Minnesota Ballpark Authority issued its first Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for public art projects at Target Field, and the response has been both enthusiastic and voluminous. Indeed, MBA administrative manager Susie Helget had just one word to say as she contemplated the flow of proposals into her office a few weeks ago: "Amazing!" By the October 24 deadline, 83 artists were vying for a chance to design and build one of the two major public art projects that are currently moving ahead at the ballpark.

The first project is the Fifth Street Panels, which involves the three large exterior panels that will extend across Target Field's northeast side, immediately adjacent to the viewing knotholes on Fifth Street. Together these eye-level, recessed panels measure 8 feet high by 84 feet long, and the art that adorns them will be a high-impact element of the ballpark's exterior. The project's \$200,000 budget reflects its prominence and visibility. Funding for the Fifth Street Panels installation is coming from the MBA's District Enhancement Fund.

The RFQ's second project site is inside the Vertical Circulation building, the two-story structure that will house the escalators and elevators used to connect commuters to the two levels of trains at the ballpark's



The Fifth Street Panels installation will be located on the ballpark's exterior panels, highly visible to fans and rail commuters. The project guidelines contemplate many ways that art that might occupy this space, including a wall relief, floor art, a hanging sculpture, or a freestanding form. Like the Fifth Street Panels, the public art in the Circulation building will enjoy a regular audience of thousands, from daily rail commuters to the large crowds that gather in the building before and after ballpark events. The project's \$150,000 budget is being funded by the Northstar Commuter Rail Line.

An 11-member Public Art Steering Committee has formed to oversee the development of guidelines and selection of artists. Chaired by MBA Commissioner Barb Sykora, the group's members are drawn from Target Field's many stakeholders, including the Twins, Hennepin County, Metro Transit, Northstar Commuter Rail Line, the Minneapolis Arts Commission, and the surrounding neighborhoods. "We have a good combination of people, some new to this kind of process and others who are more familiar [with it]," says Commissioner Sykora. The City of Minneapolis has lent its support by assigning its public arts administrator, Mary Altman, to help guide the Committee through the process.

The RFQ that kicked off these two public art projects is unlike the more familiar Request for Proposal. More a call for artists than a call for proposals, an RFQ asks applicants to submit information on their credentials



The ballpark's Vertical Circulation building, still under construction.

and experience. From this initial pool, a select handful of the most qualified are invited to develop a detailed proposal, for which they receive compensation. Launching a major project with an RFQ has become standard procedure in the world of public art, according to Mary Altman. "Public art projects used RFPs a lot in the old days, but the field is getting away from those," she explains. "It's become an ethic that artists should get paid to develop their ideas."

After many hours of reviewing responses to the RFQ, the Steering Committee has selected three finalists for each of project. These six artists are now in the midst of preparing their proposals and budgets, and the Committee should reach a final decision during the week of December 15. The Vertical Circulation building's project must be completed September 2009, while the Fifth Street Panels will be installed in time for Opening Day 2010.

The RFQ identified four broad themes for these public art projects: Baseball, Transit, Sustainability, and Minnesota/the Region. It also mandated that the installations be both enduring and durable; that they require relatively minimal maintenance; and that the artists commit to engaging the community in developing their final designs. The sheer scale of the space that these works will occupy was another important consideration. "Stadiums have big spaces and



A recent view along the 5th Street side of the ballpark.

are built to hold large numbers of people, so there is a lot of thought being put into the scale of the site and scale of artwork required here, and the number of people who will be around these works at a given time," explains Ms. Altman. Within these general parameters, however, the possibilities are wide open. "I'm excited to see what the artists will come up with," says Commissioner Sykora. "We're trying to make everything about the ballpark really outstanding . . . and the public art will be no exception."

The Fifth Street Panels and Circulation building projects are only the first in a series of public art installations envisioned for Target Field and the surrounding district. Next on the horizon are possible installations at the gateways near the HERC site and at 3rd Avenue/12th Street. The MBA won't know exactly how much additional public art funding will be available until the infrastructure budget closes out later this year, but it isn't sitting on its heels in the meantime. Instead, the MBA is encouraging the formation of new partnerships that can help develop and fund public art to enliven this emerging area of downtown.