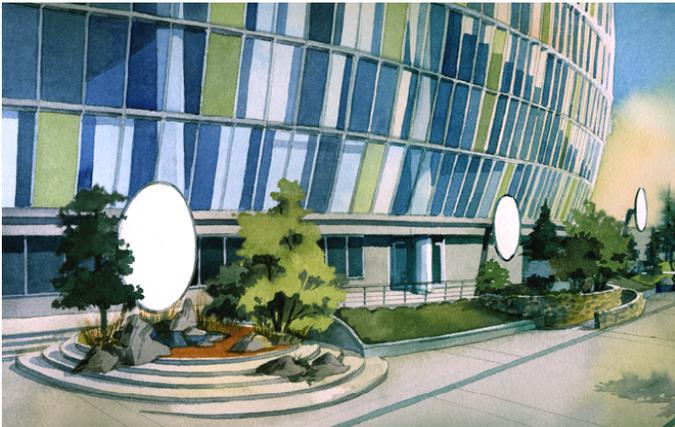

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Let the art debate start

Sprint Center proposals down to two contemporary concepts

LYNN HORSLEY

Think big oval video screens that show Kansas Citians flying into the sky. Or fake metal trees and a 75-foot basketball hoop. One of those two concepts is likely to become the \$1 million-plus public art in front of the Sprint Center.

A panel of local artists, architects and others met Wednesday to review the two finalist proposals for the 1% for Art program for the new downtown arena. Based on the arena's construction cost, the project is expected to cost at least \$1.3 million and will be among the most expensive public art works produced since the program began in the early 1990s. The panel hopes soon to recommend a winner, who must be approved by the City Council. Councilwoman Bonnie Sue Cooper, who had not seen the proposals, said she just hoped the winning proposal would be art that the public could understand.

"For the arena, it should be reflective of Kansas City, not where they have to guess what it is," she said. The two finalists, both from New York, presented contemporary concepts, each using moons, planets and sports imagery.

"That arena is pretty contemporary, too," said Porter Arneill, Kansas City's public art administrator. "As artists, it's no simple task to interact with such a monumental and remarkable design." One finalist, Chris Doyle, presented three "pocket parks" on the Grand Boulevard side of the arena. Each garden area would include a permanent outdoor video screen showing local residents, some flying in midair. Doyle said filming them could become a theatrical event.

He said he hoped to create "a sense of delight and magic and be able to engage the public." Doyle wanted to emphasize landscaping, including water elements and native Missouri plantings. The oval video screens would look like a basketball backstop, but also like the moon. He said the three gardens - "sculptural landscapes" - would be designed to appeal to pedestrians and would create a connection to the KC Live entertainment district across the street.

Dennis Oppenheim's proposal included sculptures scattered in four sites around the arena. He offered some options, but most of the sculptures would have a basketball or planetary theme. For example, round, ball-like sculptures would lie under polished chrome trees in one area. In another, a giant basketball hoop, up to 100 feet tall, would also invoke a tornado, he said. The hoop's rim, lit and turning, would mimic a moon." It would be extremely visible and extremely provocative to traffic," Oppenheim said. The sculptures would be fabricated in Los Angeles, he said.

The artist selection panel ran out of time to pick the winner, and a new meeting date has not been set. Arneill cautioned that the recommendation will have to be approved by the Municipal Art Commission, and then the contract with the artist will have to be approved by the City Council. No matter who the panel recommends, someone may be offended. Several council members said this week they haven't always been fond of the 1% for Art selections.

"I just hope it's better than what they put at the airport," Councilman Bill Skaggs said. "Have you seen that junk up there?" Mayor Kay Barnes said she would like to see art that involved landscaping, water and innovative lighting. She said she wasn't worried about a little controversy.

"It's all in the eye of the beholder," she said. "That is the nature of art."