



CITY OF APPLETON

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 4, 2026
To: Public Arts Committee
From: Steph Lynaugh, Economic Development Specialist
Subject: Select Theme for Photos to be Displayed on Houdini Welcome Tower

GENERAL INFORMATION

Owner: City of Appleton

Address/Parcel Number: Welcome Tower in Houdini Plaza, 121 W. College Avenue (Parcel #31-2-0065-00)

Request: The Public Arts Committee should select a theme for the 2026 Update to Houdini Tower.

PROJECT DETAILS

The chosen photos from the “Images that Define Appleton” photo contest were placed in the Welcome Tower in spring of 2023. In 2024, an updated contest theme was chosen - “Recreation in Appleton,” however, the contest was not held due to staffing transitions and budget constraints. Staff have budgeted for a new contest to be held and is seeking direction from the Public Arts Committee on the proposed theme for the tower.

The Committee has two options, select a theme for a new photo contest, or allow Creative Downtown Appleton Inc. to install photos of Harry Houdini to celebrate the “Year of Houdini” (more information below).

Option 1: Below staff have provided some suggestions for consideration by the committee, but the committee is welcome to choose any theme for a new photo contest:

- Favorite Buildings/Structures in Appleton – this would include images of our built environment like buildings, bridges, pavilions, monuments, etc. located within the City.
- Appleton Riverfront – photos would include anything surrounding the riverfront, including redevelopment, trails, locks, dams, eagle nests, natural features, etc.
- Favorite Images of Appleton – this could be parks, trails, buildings, artwork or anything that people love about the City.
- Photos from Kids – photos taken by kids and teenagers living in the City. The photos can have a theme (similar to the ones listed above), if desired or can just be any image submitted by individuals 18 and younger.
- **Any other suggestions or creative ideas!!!**

Option 2: Creative Downtown Appleton Inc., in cooperation with the *Year of Houdini* volunteer group, are proposing to install photos of Harry Houdini to honor the 100th anniversary of Houdini's passing. 2026 is being dubbed the "Year of Houdini" and the Society of American Magicians are hosting a convention in Appleton the first week of July. If the committee is agreeable to this option, at the April committee meeting, the members may select the proposed selection of images. The panels with this option will be paid for by private funds through Creative Downtown Appleton Inc. and installed by the City. The panels will be given to the Committee for future use. An agreement will need to be drafted between the City and Creative Downtown Inc. to memorialize the arrangement, if this option is selected.

Appleton Public Arts Committee Action:

Discuss the next Houdini Welcome Tower Theme, either option 1 (run a new contest) or option 2 (select "Year of Houdini" theme) – detail any parameters or clarifications surrounding the chosen theme. For reference, the same contest rules/parameters from 2024 are attached with the focus areas highlighted.

Future Action:

Per the Art in Public Places Policy, the recommendation from the Appleton Public Arts Committee is forwarded to the committee of jurisdiction, in this case, the Parks and Recreation Committee.

Next Steps for Option 1:

- March 4th, 2026 – Theme for Photo Contest established by Appleton Public Arts Committee
- 4pm, May 19th, 2026 – Photo Submittal Deadline
- June 3rd, 2026 – APAC selects photos and recommends to Parks and Recreation Committee (P&R)
- June 8th, 2026 – P&R reviews APAC recommendation and forwards to Common Council
- June 17th, 2026 – Common Council approves recommendation
- June-July 2026 – Production / Installation of updated photos
- Photos to be installed by **July 30th, 2026**

Next Steps for Option 2:

- March 4th, 2026 – Houdini theme chosen by Appleton Public Arts Committee
- April 1st, 2026 – Committee selects images proposed by Creative Downtown Appleton Inc. and *Year of Houdini* volunteers and recommends to Parks and Recreation Committee (P&R)
- April 6th, 2026 – P&R reviews APAC recommendation and forwards to Common Council
- April 15th, 2026 – Common Council approves recommendation
- May-June 2026 – Production / Installation of updated photos
- Photos to be installed by **June 30th, 2026**