

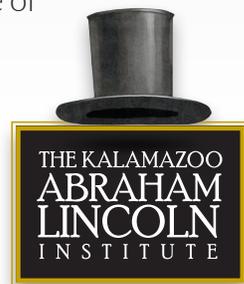
# ABRAHAM LINCOLN RETURNS TO KALAMAZOO

## A community- supported effort

For Presentation  
to the Kalamazoo  
City Commission,  
July 5, 2022

Requesting City Commission approval  
of Sculptor William Wolfe's design  
proposal for the Bronson Park  
commemorative statue of  
Abraham Lincoln.

Prepared by the  
Kalamazoo Abraham  
Lincoln Institute,  
a Michigan 501(c)3  
nonprofit corporation.



# ABRAHAM LINCOLN RETURNS TO KALAMAZOO

## STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT:

*“Discover Kalamazoo would like to express our support for the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute’s planned Bronson Park statue of Abraham Lincoln as designed by their chosen artist, Bill Wolfe. As the destination marketing organization for Kalamazoo County, we know that travelers seek memorable experiences in visually interesting spaces which they record via photo and video. Lincoln’s speech in Bronson Park is a unique and proud moment in our history, and this powerful statue by such a talented artist has the potential to become an iconic photo opportunity as visitors commemorate their time in Kalamazoo. The planned sculpture by Mr. Wolfe in Bronson Park will become a featured part of both our historical and our arts & cultural offerings—two key reasons many visitors choose to come to our area.”*

**—Jane Ghosh, President & CEO,  
Discover Kalamazoo**

*“As a former city official, lifetime city resident, and former board member and current Advisory Committee member of the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute, allow me to enthusiastically support the approval of the proposed final design of the Lincoln statute to be placed in Bronson Park! Since December of 2013, the City Commission and all relevant city departments have approved this project, which is totally supported by private funds! This commitment demonstrates the noteworthy recognition by the city of Kalamazoo of our community’s special place in the history of the nation. For generations to come it will be a call to the betterment of our society, and foster our evolution as a community open to everyone!”*

**—Attorney Robert H. Cinabro,  
Former Kalamazoo City Commissioner**

*“To Kalamazoo City Commissioners, I would like to lend my support for the proposed Lincoln Statue maquette being presented for approval. I have been involved with the group’s effort to commemorate Abraham Lincoln’s visit to Kalamazoo by memorializing this historic event through a physical symbol of his likeness. Much more important, it embodies his beliefs, values and vision for this country.*

*Although this is important by itself, the ability to pay tribute to Mr. Lincoln’s leadership by partnering with community educators and others to bring this message to our youth adds significance that can continue to strengthen the core values we hold dear as citizens of this community.*

*At a time when our communities are often divided, my hope is that the message of equity, democracy, and the importance of human rights is a story we can continue to speak out about and model for our young people.”*

**—Sherry Thomas-Cloud, M.S.W., L.M.S.W.**

*“The long awaited placement of a commemorative statue of Abraham Lincoln in Bronson Park where Lincoln gave a speech provides expanded educational opportunities upon which to build the knowledge and character of young people in our area. I continue to support the efforts of the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute to build on Lincoln’s 1856 visit, and I urge the Kalamazoo community to fully embrace this most worthwhile educational endeavor.”*

**—Dave Campbell, Superintendent  
of KRESA, Retired**

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## **Introduction: Adding community value with statuary art**

Kalamazoo's unique Lincoln legacy provides unlimited opportunities for sustained community enrichment, adding educational, economic and cultural benefit to the life of Kalamazoo. Being a 19th-century destination point for a visit and speech by one of the world's greatest statesmen makes Kalamazoo stand out among Michigan cities. Our creative celebration of that event, including statuary art honoring Abraham Lincoln's 1856 visit, will encourage tourists to make Kalamazoo a modern-day destination point.

The Henry Ford museum in Dearborn has the rocking chair Lincoln sat in when he was assassinated, and the Detroit Public Library holds the letter from young Grace Bedell encouraging Lincoln to grow his iconic beard. Kalamazoo punctuates the Michigan Lincoln Trail as the only place in Michigan where Mr. Lincoln made a public appearance and speech.

We have a story to tell and it's a story that allows young people to learn about our local history and its impact on our country at the most transformative time in the life of the nation. Most importantly, it gives young people perspective. The celebration of that legacy begins with placing statuary art on the site where history was made!

## **Background:**

The idea of celebrating Mr. Lincoln's visit and speech in Kalamazoo in a sustained manner follows three community commemorations held in Bronson Park to celebrate Lincoln's 1856 visit. The first was in 1956 followed by two subsequent celebrations—one in 1996 hosted by the Kalamazoo Valley Museum, and another celebration in 2006. In August of 2016, the Institute also sponsored a commemorative event held at the Kalamazoo Public Library to celebrate the 160th anniversary of Lincoln's visit.

In the fall of 2012, community leaders came together and created a steering committee to explore how best to commemorate Lincoln's Kalamazoo visit in

a sustained and creative way. What followed is the creation of the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute (KLI), a Michigan 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation.

We are already looking beyond the statue as we are currently working with local educators to develop a curriculum for area students based on the national issues that compelled Lincoln to visit Kalamazoo, all of which will be tied to state standards. This is in addition to the symposiums mentioned below. But even this educational component begins with a visit to Lincoln's statue in Bronson Park, which will portray a beardless Lincoln circa 1856. Discussions will naturally follow as to why Lincoln was here and that begins a launch pad for a deep dive into the history of America during that time of transformation from slavery to freedom.

## **Step-by-step approval process**

The early steering committee followed the proper protocol for city approval. After several meetings with the Kalamazoo Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) in the summer and fall of 2013, PRAB approved a motion forwarded to the city commission supporting the KLI's Lincoln statue plan for Bronson Park. In early December of 2013, the Kalamazoo City Commission approved PRAB's recommendation to place a privately-funded bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln in Bronson Park and authorized the steering committee to proceed accordingly.

Specific site location was approved by the city commission in July of 2016. The initial approval by PRAB added the stipulation that an endowment fund be established for the statue's maintenance.

In the spring of 2017, the steering committee incorporated as a Michigan non-profit corporation and received its 501(c)(3) designation from the IRS in December of the same year. The name Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute was officially adopted in the fall of 2020.

**Note:** *In addition to the preliminary meetings with PRAB, the steering committee met several times with the Kalamazoo County Public Art Commission.*

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## **Purpose of the July 5, 2022 appearance before the Kalamazoo City Commission**

The KLI has twice appeared before the Kalamazoo City Commission, once for permission to place a privately-funded bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln in Bronson Park, and the second time was to request specific site location within the park for placement of the Lincoln statue. Both requests were favorably granted. The Institute is now asking the Kalamazoo City Commission for approval of sculptor William Wolfe's proposed design (see following city of Kalamazoo public statement).

## **City of Kalamazoo public statement**

*"The City of Kalamazoo supports the placement of a privately-funded bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln in Bronson Park, and has authorized the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln [Institute] to coordinate fundraising efforts, and oversee the artistic direction for the statue design and selection of a sculptor. Final design approval is subject to the advice and consent of the City of Kalamazoo . . . The statue will be placed on ground located in the north central part of the park." – November 18, 2016 (revised January 22, 2018)*

## **FAQs:**

### **Where in Bronson Park will the Lincoln statue be located?**

The Kalamazoo City Commission has approved a specific site location in the north central part of the park (see accompanying schematic).

### **What was the process used in selecting a sculptor?**

We reviewed the process used by the Kalamazoo community in selecting the artist for the Martin Luther King Jr. statue now located in the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park in the city's Northside neighborhood. We have been careful to model best practices used in that successful community-wide effort.

Part of our community engagement included a county-wide penny drive conducted in cooperation

with Kalamazoo county public school administrators and staff, which involved hundreds of students, teachers and parents.

A Request for Qualifications was sent out nationally in January 2022 with an open call to artists submitted to the *Chicago Artists Coalition*, and *Art Opportunities*. Responses were due by March 4, 2022. Over a dozen submissions were received from across the country. The process was open, competitive, and deliberative.

Pursuant to the authority given the KLI by the city of Kalamazoo, the KLI created a four-member committee from among KLI board members who were assisted by a two-member Artistic Advisory Committee comprised of WMU art instructors Vincent Torano and Patrick Wilson. Kalamazoo Valley Museum Curator Emeritus Tom Dietz was recruited to serve as a consulting historian.

The statue committee met with Joseph A. Becherer, founding director and curator of the sculpture program at Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids and now the director of the Snite Museum of Art at the University of Notre Dame. Mr. Becherer provided valued advice and input throughout the selection process. Also, committee members independently toured relevant sculptures from around the country and sought local feedback on various artists' qualifications. These contacts included communications with park officials at Gettysburg National Cemetery.

Other contacts included a meeting with Michael Evans of the Kalamazoo Literacy Council who managed the Sojourner Truth statue project in Battle Creek. He too offered valued counsel and advice. Lincoln statue expert Dave Wieggers was also consulted.

An initial selection of five semi-finalists was narrowed to three. References were thoroughly vetted by committee members, after which each artist came to Kalamazoo to present their design maquettes. Presentations were made before the KLI board and various attending members of the Kalamazoo community.

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## Was local talent considered?

Yes, every effort was made to consider local and statewide artists. The selection process was engaging, competitive and fair.

## Who did you select as a sculptor?

Nationally renowned sculptor William Wolfe of Terre Haute, Indiana, has been selected to sculpt Kalamazoo's Lincoln statue (see accompanying bio).

## What is the target date for completion?

The statue is to be delivered by August 1, 2023. Installation and dedication will be scheduled to coincide with the anniversary of Mr. Lincoln's August 27, 1856 visit.

## Who is paying for the Lincoln statue?

The Institute has successfully met its goal of raising private donations from individuals, organizations and foundations throughout Kalamazoo and across the state. Our capital campaign honorary co-chairs were the late Moses Walker, Lynn Chen-Zhang, Blaine Lam, Ken Miller, Dr. Michael Rice, and Ron and Ruth Wisner.

## How will the statue be maintained?

One of the stipulations placed on the initial approval by the Kalamazoo Parks and Recreation Advisory Board was to establish an endowment fund for the ongoing cleaning and maintenance of the statue and for any possible repairs should they be needed. Building this fund is a work in progress. *Statue maintenance includes an annual cleaning with soap and water and re-waxing approximately every three years.*

## Who will own the statue?

Once the statue has been installed, the protocol is to have the Institute gift the statue to the city of Kalamazoo. The Institute would like to have a reverter clause in the transfer-of-ownership document that returns the statue to the Institute should the city ever remove the statue from the park.

## Economic Impact, Structural Engineering, and Landscaping

The Institute is planning to hold biennial symposiums with notable guest speakers, and with art and essay contests for area youth. We have received notice recently from a national Lincoln-related association of their interest in holding their 2024 national association meeting in Kalamazoo because of the city's proposed Lincoln statue and Kalamazoo's unique Lincoln legacy.

The infusion of tourist dollars generated from these events and the possibility of similar ones will provide Kalamazoo with a positive economic impact as these dollars will grow exponentially as they are filtered through the local economy. All of this has been shared with the leadership of *Discover Kalamazoo*. Their hearty endorsement of Artist Bill Wolfe's Lincoln statue design is attached.

One municipal cost item will result from relocating a lamp post and electric box covering on the statue site. All other site prep costs including structural engineering, landscape design and installation costs will be paid for by the Institute.

## What other programs are you planning?

Our Lincoln-legacy plans envision biennial Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Symposiums with visiting scholars and speakers, and art and essay contests for local youth. We are currently working on developing educational resources instructive of Lincoln's 1856 visit. We are committed to promoting leadership development for area youth using Lincoln's example of statesmanship.

Additional plans include collaborating with Michigan's 37 other Lincoln-related sites such as the Henry Ford in Dearborn, and with Pure Michigan to advance Michigan's Lincoln Remembrance Trail to a state-of-the-art mobile tour using the latest technology as portals for access—building on work begun by the Michigan Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Committee.

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## William 'Bill' H. Wolfe Biography

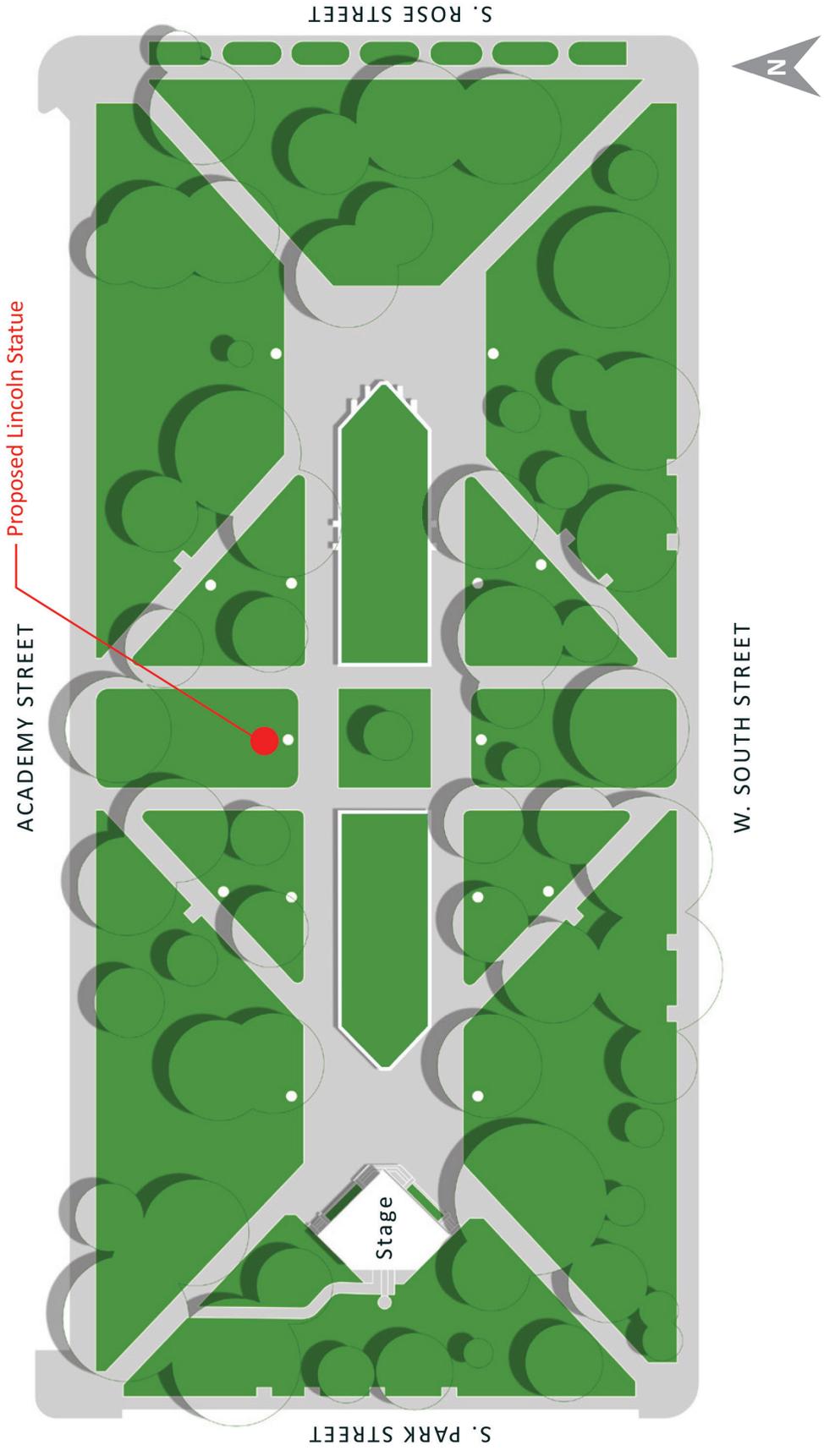
A native Hoosier, Bill Wolfe is currently the President of Wolfe Graphics. His studio is located next to Wabashiki Wetlands and the Wabash River in West Terre Haute, Indiana. His work includes over thirty sculptures located across the United States, paintings in private and public collections, and murals found on commercial and government buildings.

Bill specializes in portrait-style sculptures that capture the spirit of historical and public figures. These frequently life-size or larger-than-life-size bronze sculptures express more than realism, they often serve as an embodiment of the subject's fundamental nature.

His 15-foot Larry Bird Sculpture at Hulman Center in Terre Haute has been recognized as the #2 sports sculpture in the nation. Many of his sculptures honor veterans and historical figures that have made a difference in our world, notably Abraham Lincoln. Of particular significance is his work that honors fallen police officers. The sculptures of Brent Long and Rob Pitts can be found on the grounds of the Terre Haute Police Department.

Having studied art at Indiana State University (ISU), Bill was awarded an honorary Master's in Fine Arts degree from the University in 2018. Bill's official portrait of ISU President Daniel Bradley and his wife, Cheri, hangs in Tirey Memorial Union on the campus of ISU.

Bill's studio is often visited by clients from across the United States as well as local groups wanting to learn more about sculpting and art.



# Bronson Park

200 W. South Street

June 19, 2022

City Commission  
City of Kalamazoo  
241 W South Street  
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Dear Commissioners,

Discover Kalamazoo would like to express our support of the planned Bronson Park statue of the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute and their chosen artist, Bill Wolfe.

As the destination marketing organization for Kalamazoo County, we know that travelers seek memorable experiences in visually interesting spaces which they record via photo and video. Lincoln's speech in Bronson Park is a unique and proud moment in our history, and this powerful statue by such a talented artist has the potential to become an iconic photo opportunity as visitors commemorate their time in Kalamazoo.

Our geolocation data indicates that downtown Kalamazoo is by far the #1 place visited by travelers to Kalamazoo County, and we promote downtown heavily in our marketing and sales efforts. The planned sculpture by Mr. Wolfe in Bronson Park will become a featured part of both our historical and our arts & culture offerings, two key reasons many visitors choose to come to our area. Mr. Wolfe's fame in Indiana may also help us attract fans of his work, as Indiana is the second largest source of out-of-state visitors to Kalamazoo and we are an easy drive from some of his most well-known works.

Discover Kalamazoo is confident that the planned sculpture will enhance the reputation of Kalamazoo as a destination for leisure travelers. Therefore, on behalf of Discover Kalamazoo, I would like to register our support of the Lincoln statue by Bill Wolfe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jane S. Ghosh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right from the end of the name.

Jane S. Ghosh  
President & CEO