

MEMORANDUM

TO: Parks Advisory Commission

FROM: Downtown Parks Subcommittee

DATE: October 15, 2013

RE: Park Advisory Commission Resolution on the Downtown Parks Subcommittee recommendations

Attached is the Downtown Parks Subcommittee resolution with our recommendations for additional parks or open space in the downtown as relating to the Connecting Williams Street study submitted by the Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority. Also attached is the full report that the subcommittee produced.

In 2012, the DDA completed the Connecting William Street study. The purpose of this study was to define the best development use for five City owned properties currently used for parking in the downtown core either adjacent to or near William Street. Although portions of sites were recommended for open space, this was not the assigned focus of their plan, and many City residents felt that there needed to be an effort focusing on open space needs. City Council asked PAC to look further into the subject of downtown parks.

PAC formed a Downtown Parks Subcommittee to study the topic and develop recommendations for City Council. While the DDA study focused on the most appropriate development for each site, the Downtown Parks Subcommittee focused on how one or more of these properties might be utilized for open space, and what features, activities, and physical location would make these spaces successful. The subcommittee also considered these properties and potential new parks in the context of the existing park system and other desired amenities, such as the Greenway, recognizing that resources for development and maintenance are limited and as such the need for prioritization becomes essential.

The Park Advisory Commission developed the following mission statement: "To determine whether and what additional parks are wanted and/or needed in downtown Ann Arbor, focusing on city-owned parcels in the DDA district while maintaining awareness of additional nearby properties, for example: Liberty Plaza, 721 North Main and 415 W. Washington. The 'deliverable' will be a set of recommendations for the City Council."

From March 2013 through October 2013, the subcommittee, consisting of four members of PAC and parks staff, met 11 times. At each meeting, there were several

members of the public present and opportunities for public commentary at the start and end.

The first task of the subcommittee was to compile reading materials germane to the topic, including City master plans and studies, articles and books about best planning practices for urban spaces, and materials from various local advocacy groups.

Several committee members attended 'Placemaking' seminars, hosted by the Michigan Parks and Recreation Association, which provided valuable insight into creating successful urban open space including case studies that illustrated outcomes of Placemaking efforts.

The subcommittee then invited groups who were interested in presenting to do so during working meetings. Presentations were made by the Allen Creek Greenway Conservancy, UM Urban Planning, downtown ice skating rink advocates, Library Green Conservancy, Ann Arbor District Library (AADL), Main Street Area Association and the South University Area Association.

The subcommittee then developed a survey designed to solicit feedback from the general public. The survey was advertised widely with the goal to reach as many people as possible and this resulted in 1,608 respondents.

Two public meetings were held, with a total of 22 attendees as well as several PAC members and staff. Attendees were asked to provide more specific feedback on the existing downtown parks, the five Connecting William Street properties, 415 W. Washington, 721 N. Main St. and the parking lot on S. First and W. William St.

With this background and public input, the subcommittee developed the following recommendations:

Recommendations

1. The development of any new downtown park or open space should prioritize community preferences. The most commonly expressed community-based priorities include: a central location; sufficient size for passive recreation/community gatherings; shade; and natural features.
2. New downtown parks and open space should adhere to placemaking principles. Criteria for a successful downtown open space include: high traffic/visibility; flexible programmable space; active use on at least three sides; the ability to provide activities desired by the community; and funding for maintenance and security.

3. Any new downtown park should enliven the downtown, complement existing parks and development, and serve the community desire for a central gathering space.
4. Any additional downtown park space should not come at the expense of the quality or maintenance of Ann Arbor's existing parks. Downtowns parks are expected to be more costly to develop and maintain. Further, existing downtown parks are not currently utilized to their potential. Given the limits of current parks funding, the development of new parks should not be approved without an identified funding source for capital development, ongoing maintenance, and programming.
5. Significant capital/structural improvements to Liberty Plaza should only be made in concert with the adjacent property owner. Short-term efforts should continue to focus on smaller-scale incremental changes (removal of shrubbery) and programming opportunities (fee waiver). Future improvements should also work to create a permanent and highly visible connection between the Library Lot and Liberty Plaza.
6. The downtown could benefit from the addition of small "pocket" parks and flexible spaces. The City should work with potential developers of City-owned properties to identify opportunities, create, and maintain privately funded, but publically accessible open spaces. (e.g., the Y and Kline lots). As a part of this effort, staff should develop recommendations for how development contributions can better serve to provide and improve downtown passive recreational opportunities, including proposals such as flex space (parklets), streetscape improvements, and public art.
7. The public process for downtown parks and open space does not end with these recommendations. Any additional park/open space would require robust public input regarding the design, features, and proposed activities.
8. Based on the aforementioned criteria, the Downtown Parks Subcommittee recommends that a park/open space be developed on the Library Lot that takes advantage of the flexibility offered through temporary closures of Library Lane. The size of this space should exceed the proposed allocated open space in the Connecting William Street study. However, the subcommittee is strongly in favor of a mixed-use vision for the Library Lot. Adjacent development, including the accompanying increases in activity, is essential for the future success of additional downtown open space. In order to adequately address issues of safety and security, the Ann Arbor District Library must also be strongly represented in the planning process.

RESOLUTION APPROVING THE DOWNTOWN PARKS SUBCOMMITTEE
RECOMMENDATIONS & REPORT

Whereas, In 2012, the DDA completed the Connecting William Street study; there needed to be an effort focusing on open space needs;

Whereas, City Council asked PAC to look further into the subject of downtown parks and open spaces;

Whereas, PAC created a Downtown Parks Subcommittee to study the subject of downtown parks and open spaces;

Whereas, PAC developed the following mission statement: “To determine whether and what additional parks are wanted and/or needed in downtown Ann Arbor, focusing on city-owned parcels in the DDA district while maintaining awareness of additional nearby properties, for example: Liberty Plaza, 721 North Main and 415 W. Washington. The ‘deliverable’ will be a set of recommendations for the City Council.”;

Whereas, The Downtown Parks Subcommittee devoted considerable time and effort to learn more about downtown parks and open space and engaged the public through public meetings and a survey;

Whereas, The Downtown Parks Subcommittee has set forth recommendations as described in the Downtown Parks Subcommittee Report;

RESOLVED, that PAC accepts the Downtown Parks Subcommittee Report and approves the following recommendations in regards to downtown parks and open space:

1. The development of any new downtown park or open space should prioritize community preferences. The most commonly expressed community-based priorities include: a central location; sufficient size for passive recreation/community gatherings; shade; and natural features.
2. New downtown parks and open space should adhere to placemaking principles. Necessary cCriteria for a successful downtown open space include: high traffic/visibility; flexible programmable space; active use on at least three sides; the ability to provide activities desired by the community; and funding for maintenance and security.
3. Any new downtown park should enliven the downtown, complement existing parks and development, and serve the community desire for a central gathering space.
4. Any additional downtown park space should not come at the expense of the quality or maintenance of Ann Arbor’s existing parks. Downtowns parks are expected to be more costly to develop and maintain. Further, existing downtown

- parcs are not currently utilized to their potential. Given the limits of current parks funding, the development of new parks should not be approved without an identified funding source for capital development, ongoing maintenance, and programming.
5. Significant capital/structural improvements to Liberty Plaza should only be made in concert with the adjacent property owner. Short-term efforts should continue to focus on smaller-scale incremental changes (removal of shrubbery) and programming opportunities (fee waiver). Future improvements should also work to create a permanent and highly visible connection between the Library Lot and Liberty Plaza.
 6. The downtown could benefit from the addition of small “pocket” parks and flexible spaces. The City should work with potential developers of City-owned properties to identify opportunities, create, and maintain privately funded, but publically accessible open spaces. (e.g., the Y and Kline lots). As a part of this effort, staff should develop recommendations for how development contributions can better serve to provide and improve downtown passive recreational opportunities, including proposals such as flex space (parklets), streetscape improvements, and public art.
 7. The public process for downtown parks and open space does not end with these recommendations. Any additional park/open space would require robust public input regarding the design, features, and proposed activities.
 8. Based on the aforementioned criteria, the Downtown Parks Subcommittee recommends that a park/open space be developed on the Library Lot that takes advantage of the flexibility offered through temporary closures of Library Lane. The size of this space should exceed the proposed allocated open space in the Connecting William Street study (5,000 square feet). However, the subcommittee is strongly in favor of a mixed-use vision for the Library Lot that utilizes the city’s investment in development-ready foundation and infrastructure. Adjacent Development of the site and adjacent parcels, including the accompanying increases in activity, is essential for the future success of additional downtown open space this site. In order to adequately address issues of safety and security, the Ann Arbor District Library must also be strongly represented in the planning process.

RESOLVED, that PAC recommends that City Council accept the report and adopt the recommendations as proposed to be used as guidelines when considering adding park space/open space in the downtown core if and/or when it is deemed desired by the public or when any of the five parcels identified in the Connecting Williams Street plan are developed.

