



Legislation Text

File #: 13-1340, **Version:** 1

Resolution Accepting the Park Advisory Commission Downtown Parks Subcommittee Report on Downtown Parks

Whereas, In 2012, Council authorized the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to facilitate the process of establishing development priorities for five City-owned properties in the downtown: the Library Lot, Old YMCA Lot, Palio Lot, Kline Lot, and the first floor of the Fourth & William Parking Structure;

Whereas, The DDA completed the Connecting William Street study;

Whereas, The community expressed a need for an effort focused on the park and open space needs of the downtown area;

Whereas, City Council asked PAC to look further into 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, PAC created a Downtown Parks Subcommittee to study the subject of downtown parks and open spaces;

Whereas, The Downtown Parks Subcommittee's online survey received 1608 responses;

Whereas, The Downtown Parks Subcommittee conducted two, widely advertised public meetings held prior the recommendations being developed;

Whereas, The Downtown Parks Subcommittee listened to and received presentations made by representatives of the following groups: Allen Creek Greenway Conservancy, UM Urban Planning, ice skating rink advocates, Library Green Conservancy, Ann Arbor District Library, Main Street Area Association, and the South University Area Association;

Whereas, The Downtown Parks Subcommittee attended "Placemaking" seminars hosted by the Michigan Parks and Recreation Association;

Whereas, The Park Advisory Commission unanimously approved the Downtown Parks Subcommittee Report at their October 15, 2013 meeting; and

Whereas, The Downtown Parks Subcommittee Report contains 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 place-making principles. Necessary 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 (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. Development of the site and adjacent parcels, including the accompanying increases in activity, is essential for the future success of 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 the Council accept the PAC Downtown Parks Subcommittee Report;

RESOLVED, That Council adopt the recommendations as guidelines to be used 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; and

RESOLVED, That the City Administrator review the report and recommendations and direct staff to program and implement them as feasible within the constraints of available resources and other priorities.

Sponsored by: Councilmember Taylor