

January 20, 2010

Dear Mayor Hieftje, Councillors, and members of the Library Lot Advisory Committee,

I am deeply troubled by the direction you are taking for what goes on top of the old "Library Lot."

It appears that you have among yourselves made a plan for the use of this public land without allowing for the public to know and participate.

Currently you are listening to five responses to your Request for Proposals for use of this land. The public is allowed to be in the audience. But most of the public does not know about this opportunity to listen and ask questions, just as they did not know why the RFP was worded as it was. The public had not been heard in discussions preceding the RFP.

Your RFP stated that proposals shall be judged on their financial return to the City.

I believe that this is a mistake that must be corrected. The future use of this key open space at the heart of our city should be judged not for the money it will bring into City coffers but for its value as a common space belonging to all citizens now and in future generations. It is the only undeveloped space centrally located for a park large enough for community celebrations, rallies, demonstrations, for gatherings at times of shared grief, for musical and dramatic performances, for resting between errands, for recreation, for green respite in the midst of an increasingly dense downtown.

There are many other places where developers can build hotels or conference centers. But there is only this unique location for the urban park which Ann Arbor needs. And it already belongs to us.

I am worried that you are blinded by the terms of your RFP, which was worded with a foregone conclusion (a big hotel and conference center) already in mind. The City's current financial straits have also influenced your direction. With money so scarce and needs so great as during the present recession, it is tempting to lease this public land to a private developer in the hope of financial gain for the City. But it would be very wrong to bargain away the public's jewel--this community open space--FOREVER, just to ease our finances in a difficult time.

Besides, there is reason to doubt that a private development on this land, even subsidized by the city's investment in the parking and foundation supports, would bring in money at all. It might fail, as such proposals and structures have failed in the past. And we would be left with a white elephant and having lost forever our hope of a central urban park.

I am sure you do not want to be remembered as the people who bargained away our real treasure. Think of the regret we feel about losing our Courthouse Square in the 1950's. That was done to save money--a paltry amount compared to the loss of that green oasis, the historic gathering place since our town was first settled. Don't make that mistake again!

Please take a deep breath and set aside the requirement that the Library Lot be developed in a way to make a profit. Instead, put first the unique potential of this space to bring people together: a community space which can evolve to accommodate many activities, a place of beauty that will be remembered by all our generations and all who visit our town.

Mary Hathaway
1407 Wakefield Avenue
Ann Arbor, 48103

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Hathaway". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name and address.