



DRAFT PROPOSED SCOPE FOR RFP

Center of the City Design and Design Process

I. REQUEST:

The City of Ann Arbor is seeking information from interested planning, design and engineering firms on a design and design process for the Center of the City. The Center of the City includes city-owned property on the block between 5th Avenue, William, Division, and Liberty Streets. **Specifically, this includes Liberty Plaza, the surface of the Library Lane Parking Structure (known as the Library Lot) and Library Lane, and Kempf House.**

Interested firms, or teams of firms, are encouraged to outline a proposed approach for a design, design process, provide background information on the firm or team, and a tiered cost estimate.

The submittal of information to this RFP does not guarantee any award of a contract.

II. BACKGROUND:

1. History

On November 6, 2018, voters approved Proposal A to amend the City Charter, which states that city-owned land bounded by Fifth Avenue, and William, Division and Liberty Streets, including Liberty Plaza, the surface of the Library Lane parking structure and Library Lane itself, shall be retained in public ownership, in perpetuity, and developed as an urban central park and civic center commons known as the "Center of the City." The future of this block, especially the site commonly referred to as the "Library Lane Lot," the surface of the Library Lane underground parking structure, has been a focal point of community conversation, and often controversy.

Over its nearly 200 year history, Ann Arbor has had two downtown commons - one in front of a jailhouse on the block adjacent to the Center of the City, and one on the block that held Washtenaw County's first and second courthouses. The second county courthouse was built on the corner of Huron and Main Streets in the late 1870s and served the county for over 70 years. The 1870s courthouse, like the original, was a center of community events. Memorial Day parades started there. Fourth of July programs were held on the grounds, and summer band concerts. Visiting celebrities, including William Jennings Bryan, spoke from the courthouse steps. When no events were scheduled, workers ate lunch there, children played around the war memorial on the lawn, and others exchanged gossip on warm summer evenings. The 1870s court house and the green that surrounded it were demolished in early 1950s. Since then, numerous reports and studies have indicated a desire to create a downtown commons, often to serve a secondary purpose of connecting parts of the city together.

In recent past decades, both the City and citizen groups initiated planning processes, resulting in numerous reports and plans that expressed various visions for the Center of the City block. Without a clear consensus, however, questions remained about the future of the block's city-owned land. Ultimately, this led to the Proposal A citizen ballot initiative in 2018. With the passing of Proposal A, the direction of the block is now set towards a Center of the City urban park and civic center commons.

To advance the Center of the City, In April 2019, Ann Arbor City Council passed a resolution to establish the Center of the City Task Force with the charge "to engage citizens in visioning,

long term planning, and immediate and intermittent uses, building toward the final vision for the Center of the City on the Library Block.” The Task Force developed a report that provided an initial set of recommendations. The main body of the report can be found here: <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/programs/Pages/City-of-the-City-Task-Force.aspx> and the Appendix, which includes background documents and community engagement results, can be found here: <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/programs/Pages/Center-of-the-City-Report-Appendices.aspx>.

In response to the first recommendation in the Task Force report, *facilitate the formation of the Ann Arbor Council of the Commons*, the City has formed an official board called the Council of the Commons (<https://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/programs/Pages/Council-of-the-Commons.aspx>). The Council of the Commons is an advisory body to City Council and the City Administrator that is charged with building upon the work of the Center of the City Task Force by providing written recommendations on such subjects as funding needs, an operations and maintenance model, activation of the spaces, etc.

In response to the fifth recommendation in the Task Force Report, *authorize initial planning for the development of the public spaces on the Center of the City Block*, City Council has allocated funding, with a call for match funding from interested private entities, to complete a design for the Center of the City. With private groups having raised this match funding, the city is now ready to issue the RFP for the design.

2. Community Values

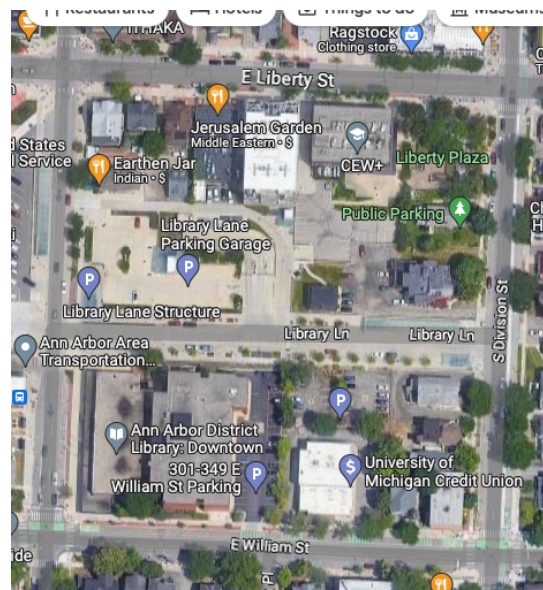
Ann Arbor is rich in its progressive values and history of political activism - values that often lead to conflict amongst community members of how property should be utilized throughout the community. Traditionally, Ann Arbor has supported revenue for its open neighborhood public spaces without pause, but as additional millages for other causes have been requested (and granted, in most cases), there is an emerging community concern with continuing to layer on new taxation requests.

The City Parks Department indicates funding limitations to maintaining its existing neighborhood spaces, and as such, Council of the Commons members began to look to other communities for funding models for the Center of the City. In the process, they discovered that taking a deliberate-activation focused approach with the Center of the City will help create an urban open space that serves a unique and new purpose within the community while reflecting Ann Arbor’s historical forward-thinking values. This new approach, Council of the Commons members believe, is crucial to setting the Center of the City up for success and more importantly, crucial to mending the wounds of the past surrounding the site.

3. Site Details

The Block

- The [block](#) is within the Downtown Development Authority District and located just two blocks from the Main Street Business District and three blocks from State Street Business District, and the University of Michigan Central Campus.
- The block includes Liberty Plaza, the Kempf House, the Ann Arbor District Library Downtown branch, restaurants, Denali Loft, and the Library Lot.
- Protected bike lanes were recently installed on Division and William Street.



- The block does include historic districts that includes several properties. Kempf House is in this district and is publicly-owned, and there are several privately owned historically-designated properties.

The Library Lot and Library Lane

- The Library Lot is about an acre in size.
- The parcel ID number 09-09-29-403-012.
- The Ann Arbor District Library Downtown branch is immediately adjacent to the south of the lot and lane and considered a key stakeholder in this effort.
- The Library Lot is currently being used for vehicle parking as the top of an underground parking structure. It is anticipated that parking will be removed from the surface of the structure, but the remaining underground levels in the structure will still provide parking.
- The parking structure was originally designed to support a building.
- The Stormwater system in place was designed for current & anticipated use.
- Electricity and water are available, but in limited locations.
- The Library Lot and Library Lane are managed through the City Community Services Office.

Liberty Plaza

- Liberty Plaza is a .26-acre urban plaza is located next to the Kempf House on the corner of Division and Liberty ([Click here to view a printable map of Liberty Plaza \(pdf\)](#)).
- The plaza has two levels with fixed benches and planters with landscaping.
- A public drinking fountain is available at Liberty Plaza.
- Though no permanent or semi-permanent restrooms are on-site, sometimes a portable restroom is placed at Liberty Plaza.
- Liberty Plaza is managed by the city's Parks Department.

Kempf House

- Kempf House is a public museum built in 1853, was home to the Kempfs, a German-American Family who lived and worked in the 1890's.
- While part of the city's Park's Department, it is independently managed by it's own board of directors.
- More information about the Kempf House can be found at: <http://www.kempfhousemuseum.org/>.

III. DELIVERABLES:

1. Anticipated Results

The city desires a final design and design process that is transformative, adaptable and inclusive. One that both physically bridges the gap between today's configuration of multi-parcel spots, but also metaphorically bridges the gap between the community's history and what 'could be.' The final design should not limit itself to a particular fixed use and/or feature, but be adaptable such that it is programmable for high-attendance events and also be just as welcoming for the occasional passerby to stop in and read a book. And finally, it must be inclusive to all members of the community and be intentionally equipped to indicate that to all.

Designers are encouraged to think outside of the standard 'box' as well as engage with the community directly to gain feedback. Considerations could include a design that:

- Creates and enhances multi-modal transportation connections to, from, and within the block.
- Includes adaptable spaces that can support various activities and functions, such as performances and speakers, outdoor markets and seasonal sports (e.g. skating/ basketball, etc).
- Offers relaxing green space, including irrigated gardens.

- Potentially includes a water feature.
- Potentially provides an active play area.
- Includes the ability to set up permanent/semi-permanent shading.
- Includes electrical connectivity for permanent/semi-permanent lighting and to support regularly-planned activities.
- Includes reconfigurable seating and tables.
- Potentially provides public restrooms.
- Incorporates public displays of art
- Is naturally seen as a community gathering space that is welcoming, fosters delight, fuels imagination, and encourages community connections and care.
- Supports social, economic, and environmental sustainability, ultimately providing a sustainable legacy for future generations.

Implementation considerations should include:

- Cost estimates for the proposed design and design process elements.
- Engineering considerations for existing structural elements, including any necessary assessing to determine any pre-existing problems.
- Methods to use the publicly-owned spaces to enhance vibrancy of the entire block, including any necessary easements (either via ground level or above ground).
- Support/identification of public and private funds to be blended/braided for both construction and ongoing costs.
- Governance and activation planning (see suggestions here: <http://a2gov.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=11684162&GUID=A4D6926B-B1CB-4407-A325-AB1696841AAB>).
- Assurances the site will be ADA accessible year-round.
- Suggested phasing recognizing 2024, the Ann Arbor Bicentennial, as a focal point on the timeline.

2. Community Engagement

It is vitally important that designers engage with the community to understand its values around open public spaces; not limiting themselves to community groups or those citizens who are typically 'more engaged,' nor to sentiments around open public space at the site in-question. Designers are also encouraged to look to Ann Arbor's past over-time and not feel limited to recent histories. These types of meaningful interactions will go a long way to producing a design that is representative of the community's inclusiveness but presents itself as an aspirational rendition of what 'could be' Ann Arbor's future of open space.

Specifically, the city desires a design process that includes a high level of transparent and meaningful community engagement using an equitable engagement approach that:

- Embraces the values of diversity and inclusivity of all residents/visitors.
- Acknowledges and speaks to the roles of dignity, race, power, and injustice.
- Helps build trust by providing real opportunity for input.
- Honors varying opinions and seeks to build common ground.
- Adapts to community needs.

As previously mentioned, is critical for this effort to have an equitable engagement approach that is highly inclusive of members of our community that have historically had limited participation with City decision-making processes. Keeping this as the central tenet and top priority of the engagement process, the engagement approach could also include the following interested and/or affected parties:

- Council of the Commons – A city board that plays an advisory role to City Council and the City Administrator regarding the future of the Center of the City Civic Center Commons. <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/programs/Pages/Council-of-the-Commons.aspx>

- The Center of the City Task Force - A temporary commission that created initial recommendations and had a broad swatch of participants. <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/programs/Documents/Center%20of%20the%20City%20Task%20Force%20Final%20Report%202020.pdf>
- Library Green Conservancy – A nonprofit that organized to create an urban park and civic center next to the downtown branch of the Ann Arbor District Library. The Library Green Conservancy is represented by two members on the Council of the Commons. <https://a2centralpark.org/>
- Initiating Committee – A nonprofit, recognized by City Council as a community-based authority, that organized to activate the Center of the City and advance the understanding and implementation of community commons. Members of the Initiating Committee overlap with the Library Green Conservancy, and also include a volunteer gardening group called The Green Team. The Initiating Committee is also represented by two members on the Council of the Commons. <https://annarborcommunitycommons.org/>.
- Parks Advisory Commission – A city commission that plays an advisory role to City Council on park matters. This group currently provides advisory direction on Liberty Plaza and Kempf House. <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/Parks-Recreation/administrative/pages/parks-advisory-commission.aspx>
- Planning Commission – A city commission enabled by the state planning act that provides direction on land use and oversees the city's Master Plan. <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/planning/development-review/Pages/CityPlanningCommission.aspx>.
- Downtown Development Authority – The block is within their district and they manage the parking structure. <https://www.a2dda.org/>
- Ann Arbor Farmers Market - The farmers market is a great example of a popular local open space that is routinely activated and draws thousands of visitors each year. <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/Parks-Recreation/parks-places/farmers-market/pages/default.aspx>
- Ann Arbor District Library - The Ann Arbor District Library Downtown branch is immediately adjacent to the south of the Library Lane Lot. <https://aadl.org/>
- The Ride – Also known as the Ann Arbor Area Transit Authority (AAATA). AAATA's main terminal is located across the street on 5th Street. <https://www.theride.org/>.
- Ann Arbor Housing Commission – Ann Arbor Housing Commission (AAHC) seeks to provide desirable housing and related supportive services for low-income individuals and families on a transitional and/or permanent basis and is currently in the process of preparing a property for development across 5th Street, next to the The Ride's terminal (known as the old YMCA lot). <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/Housing/Pages/default.aspx>.
<https://www.a2gov.org/departments/planning/Pages/Public-Engagement-for-Use-of-Vacant-City-Owned-Lots.aspx>
- The Treeline – The Treeline Project is a proposed urban trail that is meant to provide a non-motorized transportation facility through downtown connecting people to key destinations along the way. The city is currently working with a non-profit called the Treeline Conservancy to help advance this project. <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/programs/Pages/Allen-Creek-Greenway-Master-Plan-Project.aspx>.
<https://thetreeline.org/>.
- Main Street Association – Main Street Area Association is a membership-based association of local business, organizations, and individuals committed to the long term success and vitality of Downtown Ann Arbor. <https://mainstreetannarbor.org/about>.
- State Street District – The State Street District represents the neighborhood to various government bodies and works closely with public agencies, the University of Michigan, the DDA, and other downtown associations in order to sustain an economically strong environment for area businesses. <https://statestreetdistrict.org/>.
- Kerrytown – A prominent shopping and gathering hub in Ann Arbor. <http://kerrytown.com/>.

- Constituency groups that represent different communities of individuals, such as:
 - Faith-based groups
 - Advocates for people experiencing homelessness
 - Advocates for marginalized populations
 - Advocates for persons with disabilities
 - Youth-based groups
 - Groups that promote Ann Arbor’s international culture
- Equitable Ann Arbor Land Trust (EA2) – A recently formed non-profit working to address affordable housing.
- Businesses, property owners, and residents on or around the block that include, but are not limited to:
 - Denali Lofts – A large residential structure on the block. <https://www.apartments.com/denali-lofts-ann-arbor-mi/00sm5r3/>.
 - First Martin Corporation – A major property owner on the block. <https://www.firstmartin.com/>
 - Ann Arbor SPARK – An economic development agency located next to Liberty Plaza. <https://annarborusa.org/>
 - Restaurants and business along neighboring streets

IV. DISCLAIMER:

The City shall not in any way be liable or responsible for cost incurred in responding to this RFP. All information received in response to this RFP becomes the exclusive property of the City. All responses to this RFP become matter of public record and shall be regarded as public records. The City shall not in any way be liable or responsible for the disclosure of such records, including, with limitation, those so marked, if disclosure is required by law, or by any order of a court of competent jurisdiction.

V. INSTRUCTIONS:

Respondents should include a letter of interest, firm or team background, an overview of a proposed design and design process approach, and a tiered cost estimate for the proposed approach. If possible, include information on similar projects completed by your firm or team.