

Un-paving the parking lot — what's the status on the Library Lot saga?

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Groundcover contributor

I joined the Council of the Commons early this year with little foresight and wide eyes. As a student affiliated with the University of Michigan for more than five years, I often find myself stuck in the bubble of academia, separate from local politics and current events. The “U” has that magnetic pull for me. Fortunately, as a budding urban planner, I can observe the wondrous magic of Tree Town through my class projects, my research and my spontaneous walks along the Huron.

Like many, I romanticize A2, diluting it to a dreamlike fantasy I keep close to my heart. Over time, I have also developed an understanding of the not so magical town-gown relationship, the prevalence of NIMBY, single-family housing culture and the like. While I initially experienced barriers to participating in Ann Arbor politics, volunteering my time toward making progress on the Library Lot has been a humble and insightful beginning.

I hail from the San Francisco Bay Area where my connection to place is

rooted in software engineers, earthquake drills and year-round flip flop weather. Fleeing to the Great Lakes State at age 18 felt rebellious albeit I had no idea what Michigan could offer me at the time. At present, I consider Ann Arbor to be my primary home. It's where I can be most vulnerable and authentic — whether it be Kerrytown, the Big House or the Old West Side.

The city-owned Library Lot parking lot along Fifth Avenue in downtown Ann Arbor is part of the City's envisioned urban central park and civic center commons known as the “Center of the City.” For many, it's controversial, political and personal. While I have only dug into its history over the last year, some townies have been involved with the site for decades. However, I can offer my neighbors some insight into how the Council of the Commons has addressed activating the lot and moving forward with redevelopment.

For starters, the Council of the Commons (CoC) is an advisory body to the City Council that builds upon the work of the Center of the City Task Force. Our first meeting was in March

2021. As a unit, CoC members support the activation of the Library Lot, which means we recognize the potential for the site beyond surface-level parking. In the interim, before the lot is more significantly transformed, some examples of activation methods might be bringing in food trucks, yoga, flexible public seating, concerts, art or demonstrations. While the CoC is still researching these activation methods as well as engaging with block partners, stakeholders and the greater public, the opportunities for activation are endless and build upon past visioning exercises.

As a young person, I urge my peers to get educated on Ann Arbor politics, and better yet, get involved. You may be surprised by what's happening in your own backyard. Please keep a lookout for future CoC-facilitated public engagement and community events. In the meantime, meetings are live broadcasted on CTN Cable Channel 16, ATT Channel 99 and online at a2gov.org/watchCTN. To speak at public comment, call 206-337-9723 or 213-338-8477 or Toll Free 877-853-5247 or 888-788-0099. Enter Meeting ID: 933 1585 9113.

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