

ANN ARBOR FARMERS MARKET

Infrastructure Improvement Project

Purpose

The proposed infrastructure improvements for the Ann Arbor Farmers Market focus on a new market structure to expand vendor stall capacity year-round. The project is intended to serve the market's vendors, customers and staff as the market evolves and continues to provide a critical outlet for local food in the community and serves as a central community gathering space throughout the year. In recent years, innovative farming practices and increased demand for year-round local food sources have emphasized the importance of winter operations at the Ann Arbor Farmers Market. Farmers are in need of consistent retail outlets that provide adequate shelter and climate control for produce, even during the harshest months of winter. Furthermore there is a need to provide more equitable stall accommodations to the market's 120 vendors by providing additional covered stall spaces in the summer within the bounds of the existing market.



This project reflects the priorities of the Public Market Advisory Commission (PMAC), which has long advocated for the expansion and improvement of market infrastructure for winter purposes. It also addresses an identified need in the City's FY2016-2021 Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) and the 2010-2015 Parks and Recreation Open Space (PROS) Plan and furthers the Local Food goal set forth in the City's Sustainability Framework. Parks & Recreation Services is committed to improving and sustaining this community asset within downtown Ann Arbor through the timely realization of this infrastructure improvement project.

Background

The need for improved market amenities, particularly to accommodate vendors during the winter months, has been a reoccurring theme among vendors, customers, PMAC and market staff for a number of years. Within the last three years PMAC and city staff have evaluated the level of need for such improvements. In April 2014 PMAC conducted a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the market's physical infrastructure. Following that exercise, surveys were created to understand vendor and customer priorities for market improvements. Survey responses



from 350 market customers and 61 vendors identified two shared priority areas for desired improvements among both vendors and customers: winterization efforts and an increased capacity for covered vendor stall space at the market.

In response to the priority areas highlighted in the 2014 survey results, staff and PMAC began to identify possible solutions for these needs. Several winterization options were considered in the initial evaluation for this project. Staff and PMAC explored the possibility for moveable, impermanent options such as tarps or wind shields that would serve as adaptations of the existing market structure. One major complication of making adjustments to the existing structure

is the inability of the existing vendor canopy steel structural system to handle the increased wind loads which would result from adding such features. This comes with an unknown cost for retrofitting the current structure, in addition to the cost of fabricating and installing winterized siding. Additionally, the

winterization of the existing market structure would not increase the number of covered stall spaces available to market vendors throughout the year. These limiting factors informed the current proposed project for a new structure.

In March 2015, staff conducted a vendor survey in which 58 of the 96 respondents indicated that a fully-enclosed space would motivate them to attend market regularly during the winter months of January through March. This anticipated use of a fully enclosed structure was notably higher than for the other levels of winterization proposed in the survey (wind breaks or garage-style doors). These survey results further underscored the potential to engage nearly 60 market vendors each week during the months of January through March if a new building were to be constructed. This signifies a doubling of the market size throughout these months, which benefits both market vendors and customers in offering a more robust local food outlet year-round.

Design

The physical location for the proposed structure currently functions as an unsheltered, paved lot that accommodates up to 18 vendors during the busiest months of the market season. Preliminary vendor layouts within the new structure would provide 24 additional spaces through these busy months, for a total of 42 vendor spaces. The design incorporates large, bi-fold and garage-style doors on the sides and ends of the new market structure, which will be opened for market days during the months of April through December to mirror the open-air environment of the existing market.

The building will also provide sufficient shelter during the coldest months of the year. On average, 30 vendors attend the market during the months of January through March. With the proposed indoor stall layout, 28 additional vendors could be accommodated in a heated, indoor space, for a total of 58 vendor spaces during these winter months.

The proposed vendor stall layouts more than double the number of stall spaces currently available in the paved lot area. This increased capacity accommodates all market vendors more equitably by providing covered stall spaces; it also has the potential to alleviate sidewalk congestion which has increased in recent years as the number of vendors operating at market has increased in an effort to satisfy the growing consumer demand for local food.

The building's main entrance will be situated on 4th Avenue, creating an important new street presence and central entranceway for the market. The increased visibility will further engage the community with the market on a daily basis, with clearer signage signifying the market's presence and a more attractive façade that enhances the streetscape.



Funding

The Public Market Advisory Commission has supported the use of \$350,000.00 of the market's assigned available fund balance to be used in conjunction with \$100,000.00 in previously approved park millage funds and \$129,000.00 in developer park contributions earmarked in the developer agreement for 413 E. Huron. These three funding sources account for \$579,000 in currently available funds for the Market Infrastructure Improvement Project. Other funding partnerships and opportunities are being explored as estimates of the total project cost are developed.