

20 May 2021

TO: Ann Arbor Council of the Commons

FR: Robert Black/Initiating Committee Advisor 

RE: Ann Arbor Community Commons - Suggestions for Next Steps

**INTENTION:**

This memo is offered to describe possible actions for consideration that may assist the **Council of the Commons** in its efforts to create momentum in developing the next phases of the above project.

With the good work done by the **Center of the City Task Force** - as described in its summary report of Feb 2020 - and the continuing efforts to date of the volunteers of the **Initiating Committee**, the attached materials and descriptions noted below are provided as food for thought in designing a way forward for this important and timely project for Ann Arbor.

**PROCESS:**

Good groundwork at this stage of the project is critical to form thorough understandings and alignment of purpose among all players in the Commons. As has been mentioned in previous meetings, it is highly recommended that the members of the **Council of the Commons** hold a professionally facilitated working session in the near term that would identify commonalities and differences, assess key priorities, and establish a practical action plan for moving forward – all according to a reasonable and realistic time frame to be determined from group intentions and agreements. An example of this process is detailed on the attached pages.

This groundwork involves a clear understanding of the ideas gathered and recommendations made to date, which is already underway on the **Council of the Commons**. Building on this foundation is paramount to future successes. Moreover, taking time now to re-engage the broader community of constituents and invite participation will help ensure that the goals and ideals of the Commons can be achieved and continue to showcase Ann Arbor as a world leader.

**PROGRAM:**

A well-defined and articulated **Physical Elements Program** provides a template and guide for decision making and will form the basis of agreements made with professional Planners, Architects, Engineers and Artists who will ultimately be employed to carry out the vision of the Commons. The Physical Elements Program is a tabulation of each component of the Commons, defined and detailed in such a way as to articulate both its quantitative and qualitative aspects. A draft example of this, developed from many inputs to date, is shown on the attached pages. Another important part of the Programming Phase is to creatively envision various possibilities of an ideal or preferred future vision for the Ann Arbor Community Commons. Exciting artistic renderings of ideas have already been presented by Stephan Trendov and other imaginative professionals to help inspire and engage the greater community.

PRODUCT:

A natural outcome of “preparing the soil” as described above for such a unique project as the **Ann Arbor Community Commons** is to improve the probability that the project will come to fruition in a timely manner and be realized within its prescribed budget parameters. Getting to a “plan” for the manifestation of the physical elements of the Commons requires several important preparatory steps that can be carried out prior to incurring more substantial costs:

- Thoughtful analysis and documentation of the Community’s needs (many of which were described in the Center of the City Task Force Report).
- Preparation of a Preliminary Program of Physical Elements Document.
- Projections of estimated potential project cost ranges, including preliminary contingency ideas to respond to unforeseen events.
- Preliminary Strategies and Timeline to implement defined phases of the project.

Leveraging local resources, cultivating strong relationships with key partners in the Commons and inviting and involving local volunteers from the greater community will serve to build a strong coalition of many people working together to achieve a memorable and exemplary project. Doing this early work well will help bring the vision a true “heart space” for Ann Arbor to reality, one step at a time. The **Ann Arbor Community Commons** will continue to serve and inspire people of all walks of life for many years into the future.

ATTACHMENTS:

Suggestions for Next Steps in the Council of the Commons (CoC) Process (Prepared by the A2C2 Initiating Committee and Advisor/RBlack/4-2-21)

Image A: Ann Arbor Commons Block Partners Group (Center of the City Task Force Recommendation No. 2).

Image B: A2C2 Growing Green Space (Center of the City Task Force Recommendation No. 3).

A2C2 – ProgramRelatDiag-TEMP-5-14-21

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## **Suggestions for Next Steps in the Council of the Commons (CoC) Process**

*Prepared by the A2C2 Initiating Committee and Advisor/R.Black/4-2-21*

Invite the CoC to build on the foundation of substantial progress to date on the Ann Arbor Commons project by focusing on Recommendations No. 2 and No. 3 of the Center of the City Task Force Report, dated 28 February 2020.

*(Note: Task Force Recommendation No. 1 is already underway with the Council of the Commons defining roles/responsibilities, creating by-laws, and educating itself about commons and commoning.)*

### **Suggested CoC Focus Item A:**

*Recommendation No. 2-Schedule regular meetings of a Center of the City Block Partners Group.*

This is a key action to support the next steps of the Ann Arbor Commons project. As stated in the Center of the City Task Force Report, the Council of the Commons should request the City Administrator to call a first meeting of the Block Partners Group, inviting a representative from each stakeholder on the block to attend. The intention of the meeting is to share progress information on the Ann Arbor Commons project, to engage block stakeholders in the Commons conversation and to explore potential ways in which strategic partnerships could support the highest and best outcomes for Ann Arbor. Subsequent meetings could be scheduled as needed pending discussions and outcomes of the first meeting of the Block Partners Group.

*(See Image A for summary of key stakeholders)*

### **Suggested CoC Focus Item B:**

*Recommendation No. 3-Remove ground-level parking on the Library Lot parking structure and begin efforts to redesign as an active public space.*

Eleven “Action Steps” for this item were prescribed in the Task Force Report. In order to evaluate and prioritize these steps, ***it is suggested that the CoC schedule one of its regular meetings as a “working session” with this topic as the sole agenda item.*** The work session would be facilitated from within the CoC by the Chair and/or Co-Chair, with support from City Staff liaison. The intention of the worksession is to build strategic alliances within the CoC and to create a focus to affordable, actionable tasks to be accomplished according to an agreed-upon timeline for Task Force Recommendation No. 3.

*(See Image B for a general summary of Recommendation No. 3 and representative images to prompt further discussion).*

### **Alternate Process:**

A possible alternative to facilitating the worksession from within the CoC, is to ***consider engaging an independent professional facilitator to guide the worksession.*** This process would allow all members of the CoC and City Staff representatives to freely participate in the worksession. Following the City's Fair Procurement practices, a simple RFP for such a service could be drafted to solicit interest from qualified facilitators. Ideally, the RFP would request a pro bono facilitation for this phase of the work, to conserve limited financial resources.

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### **Suggested Facilitated Worksession:**

*Following is a brief outline of a possible structure and process for a proposed worksession. There are a variety of facilitation structures beyond this outline that could be utilized depending on the particular intentions and desires of CoC members and the facilitator(s) selected.*

#### Worksession Logistics

- Establish date and determine whether the meeting will be virtual or in-person.
- Decide duration of worksession (2 - 3 hours?)
- Prepare Agenda and Preferred Worksession Outcomes in advance. *Seek CoC consensus for first worksession to focus on Task Force Recommendation No. 3.*

#### Situation Assessment

Prepare and distribute to CoC members key background information prior to the worksession. Background materials could be posted on a commonly-accessible electronic site and include:

- ✓ Key findings of the Center of the City Task force, along with Appendix materials;
  - ✓ Parcel maps defining extent of A2 Commons public lands;
  - ✓ Adjoining parcels and constituent stakeholders of the Commons Block;
  - ✓ Context influences to the Commons (i.e., AAATA, DDA Capital Projects, Housing, etc);
  - ✓ Constraining forces (i.e., City services, zoning reqmts, structural issues, etc.)
  - ✓ Other materials TBD as appropriate.
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### **Suggestion for Potential CoC Worksession Agenda** *(times noted are approximate)*

#### Gather & Focus (10-20 min. prior to Start Time)

- Informal conversations.
- Participants Ready to Start on Time.

#### Whole-group Session (20-30 min.)

- Facilitator(s) give Overview of Intention and Desired Outcome of the Worksession.
- Do a collaborative process to engage the group in dialogue (Informal S.W.O.T\* analysis).
- Define key issues to explore and questions to answer in Break-out Session.

### Break-out Session (30-45 min.)

- Two Max-Mix\*\* teams of 8-10 people each. Assign a table captain and scribe.
- Discuss and record comments/ideas on the issues/questions raised in Whole-Group Session.
- Capture a separate list of new concerns/issues that arise.
- Employ a process to insure that each person has an opportunity to speak.
- Record all comments on large *Post-It* sheets or similar method.

### Reconvene Whole Group for Brief Summary Reports by Break-out Teams (15-25 min.)

- A spokesperson for each group reports key findings and new questions.
- Recorded comments/ideas to remain on display.
- Group members record personal questions/ideas for next segment's discussion.

### Break (15 +/- min.)

- Informal conversations & informal processing.
- Facilitator(s) consolidate Common Themes and Divergent Issues from Break-out Teams.

### Whole Group Session: Review Commonalities & Differences of Break-Out Teams

- Review Consolidated Concepts and Divergences - work to decrease Divergences.
- *Visual-voting* priorities process. (10 min.)
- Identify Preferred Long-term Goals and Timeline (*Consider focusing toward a milestone of the 2024 Ann Arbor Bi-Centennial Celebration*)
- Establish Near/Mid-term Objectives and Timeline
- Define Tasks & Prioritized Actions. Work toward Consensus Agreement on all issues.
- Set aside non-consensus Differences for future work.

### Set Action Plan for Near Term Tasks

- Identify Responsible Person(s) and time goal for each task.
- Establish Progress Tracking System for CoC members to review real-time Task updates.
- Create sequence steps for meeting through end of CY 2021.
- Set Next Meeting Date/Time. Confirm Agenda process by CoC Chairperson.

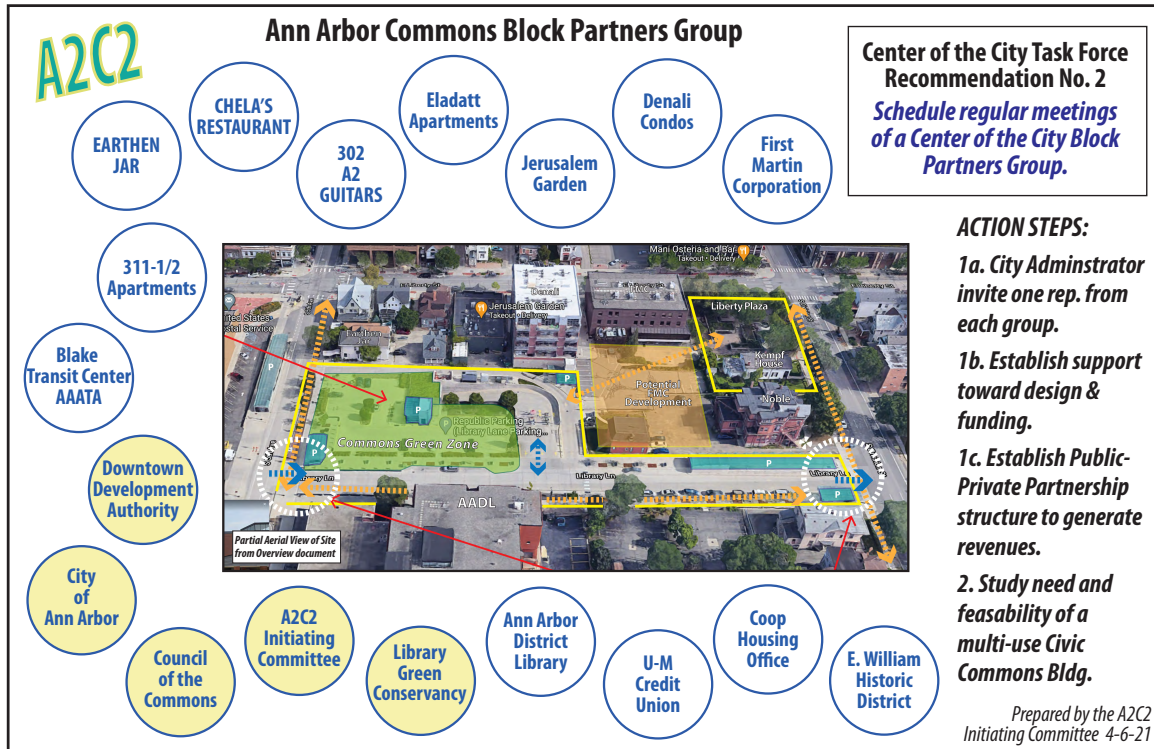
### **Record meetings and post documents to encourage on-going Public Engagement and Inputs.**

#### Notes:

\*S.W.O.T. = *Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats* (a commonly used process)

\*\*Max-Mix = *Divide break-outs with individuals of diverse constituencies on each team.*

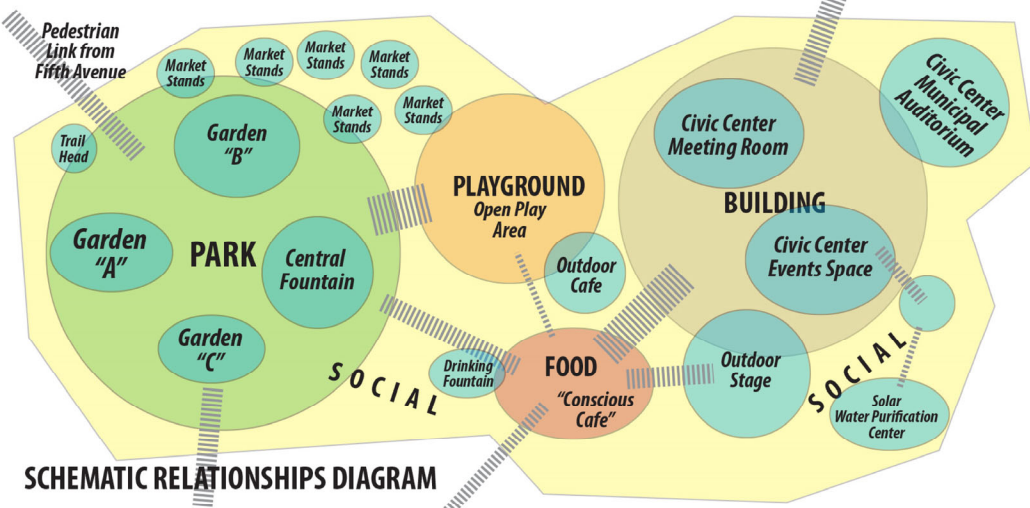
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**IMAGE A**



**IMAGE B**



**The Initiating Committee of the Ann Arbor Commons reviewed inputs and communications from all constituent parties who contributed to this project to date. This is an initial summary for further discussion.**



### Preliminary Physical Elements Program Template

ID	Element/Activity	Description	Qty	Size/Area	Notes
<b>PARK</b>					
P-1	Central Fountain	Solar powered; surrounding pond/canal; Water Fountain Sculpture	1	TBD	Important element to create focus and help orient users. Part of the "commons of the Commons"
P-2	Drinking Fountain	ADA accessible; Understand water source & flow to drain; recycle grey water?	4	Human-scale; single, double, or multiple faucets	Artistic, beautiful, historic, educational...think of the "Hamilton Fountain" at State St. and U-M Diag.
P-3	Garden A	Multi-floral; multi-sensory; educational	1	Part of Liberty Plaza Parkscape? Make this a particular destination.	ADA accessible with raised beds
P-4	Garden B	Rose Garden; Birds/Bees/Butterfly Pollinators; Rainwater Collection	1	Horizontal and Vertical Gardens - knit layout into other elements - make some "garden walls" (Bonnie)	Ambulatory experience to view, learn, relax...ala Peony Garden (U-M Arboretum) or the Gardens of the Cloisters (NYC).
P-5	Garden C	Movable/Seasonal Pots/Plots	12	Number and locations TBD	Involve a "Garden Club" to plant/replace/maintain these elements. Consider edible plants to be used by local food places (Jerusalem Garden, etc.)
P-6	Gazebo ??	ADA accessible; Location near Wedding/Events Room	1	TBD	Needs more definition and justification for use.
P-7	TrailHead	Pathways Crossroads; linkages to "Tree Line / Greenway"			Single gathering point - near existing "Center of City" marker?? Layout the "trail" through The Commons. Create pathway linkages to surrounding trails networks (in-town and beyond). Consider artwork and interpretive signage at strategic points along trails.
<b>PLAYGROUND</b>					
PG-1	Open Play Area	40' x 40'?; grass surface?? Variety of topography? Include seating for other people to supervise children or just to watch activity.	1		Locate near café?
PG-2	Sand "Box"	Creative Shape with interactive "Play/Teaching" elements for children of all ages;	1		Symbolic "beach"? What is the meaning and teaching of "sand"? Emphasis on ADA accessibility, safety and minimal liability to City.
PG-3	Toys ??	Safe; teaching; tactile; interactive	TBD		No Inside TOYS-maint. Issue
PG-4	Carousel ??	Small-scale; multi-modal "rides"; solar powered	1		Combine "entertainment" with "education"

<b>SOCIAL</b>					
S-1	Outdoor Stage	Amphitheatre concept-Seating for 100	1		Allow for overflow audience
S1-2	Lighting	"Task-ambient" concepted - Integrated into physical elements as appropriate.			Flexible LED type fixtures-relocatable?
S-3	Movable Screen	LED? Front or Rear Projection?	1?	20' wide?	
S-4	Movable Panels	Demountable, recycled/renewable materials to define temporary spaces of a variety of sizes and uses.			Need more detail for purpose
S-5	Sculpture(s)	Art, Culture, Education, Sustainable	TBD	TBD	Set competition(s) parametrs
S-6	Dance Floor	Integrate with "Stage" element	1		
S-7	Peace Pole	Honoring all countries, cultures, humans	1		Strategic location (i.e. "lithopuncture" point of the site)
S-8	Veterans Monument	Unified Monument to All Veterans	1	TBD	Wall? Or Sculptural "Kiosks"?
S-9	Internet HotSpot/Recharge Station	Small Photovoltaic roof/canopy	multi		Integrate w/other element(s)
S-10	Information Kiosk	Digital, chalk, ephemeral paper?	1	TBD	Central Location
S-11	Benches	Diversity of form, styles TBD	TBD	solo, 2,4, 5+	Single of multi (Park Guell?)
S-12	Outdoor Café	3?-4? Season use?	1	20-50 p	Integrate w/food & waste
S-13	Japanese Rock Garden	Dry or wet element - use as buffer or edging element - incorporate possible raingarden(s). Demonstration of Xeriscaping and low maintenance.			
S-14	Chess Table(s)	2-person fixed table/benches - arranged in a row along a pathway, wide enough for observers to gather.		TBD	Set along walkways
S-15	Ping Pong Table(s) ??				Decide if this is necessary to include.
S-16	Winter Ice-skating Rink	Part of Water elements (pond/canal)	1		Locate near a physical structure that could be a "warming shelter". Model after ice rink at Rockefeller Center/NYC??

<b>FOOD</b>					
F-1	Pop-Up "Market Stands" (See B-1 below)	Various Foods, also rentable for weekly use by musicians, local artists, etc.	8+		Similar to "Mark's Carts" Idea. F-1 formerly listed as "Food Trucks"
F-2	Chestnut Roasting Area	A safe "fire-circle" with associated seating around.			This could be the "winter" use of a seasonal-use physical element - located in the "commons of the Commons"
F-3	Cotton Candy Place	Part of a temporary, seasonal structure that is either permanent or demountable (See S-4, "Movable Panels").			Needs more definition -might be incorporated with F-1, "Pop-Up Market Stands".
<b>BUILDING</b>					
B-1	Civic Center - Meeting Room	ADA Accessible, multi-media, flex seats	100 ?	TBD	Multi-purpose space. Corellate with B-2a, B2b, B-3. Possible Partner with FMC??
B-2a	Civic Center - Community Theatre	ADA Accessible, multi-media, flex seats	100 ?	TBD	Multi-purpose space. Corellate with B-1, B2b, B-3. Possible Partner with A2CT??
B-2b	Civic Center Municipal Auditorium	ADA Accessible, multi-media, flex seats	100 ?	TBD	Multi-purpose space. Corellate with B-2a, B2b, B-3. Possible Partner with AADL??
B-3	Civic Center - Events Space	ADA Accessible, multi-media, flex seats	100 ?	TBD	Multi-purpose space. Corellate with B-2a, B2b, B-3. Possible Partner with FMC??
B-4	Solar Water Purification Center	Stand-alone Physical Element (Educational Point)			Consider link to at least one demonstration drinking fountain.
B-5	"Conscious Café"	Integrated with S-12 above	1	TBD	"social/slow" food concept
B-6	Outside Market Stands	Associated with F-1 above.			

PLEASE NOTE: THE ABOVE TABLE IS AN EXAMPLE OF ONE WAY THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF A "PLANNING PROGRAM" MAY BE ORGANIZED. IT IS BASED ON DATA GATHERED TO DATE FROM SEVERAL SOURCES AND IS INTENDED TO BE EDITED AS NEW IDEAS EMERGE.