

# **Recommendations for the Implementation of the Center of the City**

Frank Wilhelme and Rita Mitchell  
Council of the Commons Members  
Representing the Library Green Conservancy

## **Center of the City Task Force Final Report Vision Statement**

\*Our vision is to create spaces that are:

- Inclusive and welcoming to everyone
- Safe, active, and foster a culture of peace and non-violence
- Easy to see, easy to get to, and easy to get through
- Flexible, adaptable and sustainable
- Inspiring and promote life-long learning

It is important to continue to engage with the community in the co-creation of this vision.

\*Center of the City Task Force Final Report, p. 7

# Short Term Plan

**Timeframe:** June 2021 through December 2022.

**Scope:** The plan will incorporate all elements of public land on the Library Block as well as potential public easements to facilitate community access to the Center of the City. We recommend that Liberty Plaza, the Library Lot surface parking area, and Library Lane be viewed as an integrated space for planning purposes. Each of these three areas will require different approaches and resources to support the vision of the Center of the City. We believe that testing various activation approaches in the coming months will inform the planning and design efforts that will be undertaken during the Intermediate Plan phase.

**Management:** Management of the Center of the City should be a coordinated and integrated process involving the Parks Department, the Downtown Development Authority, other relevant City administrative units, selected Block Partners, and interested community groups, including the Ann Arbor Community Commons Initiating Committee and the Library Green Conservancy. We recommend establishment of a standing management committee and standard procedures for use of the spaces.

**Experiences associated with the park and commons:** The Task Force process included surveys of community members, who were asked, “What experiences support your

ideal commons?” Respondents were asked to rank order a set of experiences. We included a selection of quotes from one of the surveys at the end of this proposal.\*\* Our interpretation of the summary information is that the respondents support a range of pedestrian-oriented activities, from solo reading, to entertainment, to providing space and activities that engage social interactions. The full set of survey responses is located here:

<https://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/programs/Documents/E.b%20Online%20Survey%20Results.pdf>

### **Initial Use of the park and commons:**

We support Short Term efforts to identify and implement simple, low cost actions that address the community’s impatience with activation of the surface of the parking structure, as well as improvements to Liberty Plaza.

Beginning in June 2021, the Library Lot surface parking area should be reserved each Saturday and Sunday at a minimum, for general park and commons public use. Scheduled events should be encouraged on weekends and during the week, using the procedures developed by the management team. The Parks Department should be engaged to assist with identifying and addressing design and use concerns with Liberty Plaza. All activities should comply with current state and local covid-19 guidelines.

Initial activation of the Center of the City should be informed by the citizen input and survey data gathered through outreach activities sponsored by the Center of the City Task Force and described in its Final Report, as referenced in the link above regarding survey responses. We recommend activities that are likely to attract a cross section of the community to the space, such as food carts, amateur musicians and entertainers, and activities that will attract families.

Equipment and facilities to support these initial activities include benches, tables, a stage platform, sun-umbrellas, WiFi, electrical hook ups, restrooms, projection screen, trash/recycling containers and storage facilities. Additional attractions that enhance visitor experiences and that are known to boost foot traffic include fountains, sculptures and play areas should be considered and tested.

Services associated with proper operation of the park and commons include general security, trash/recyclable pick up, restroom cleaning, and maintenance. A combination of city and DDA employees, and volunteers will be needed to effectively implement the services..

A robust variety of programming should be encouraged. In addition to special events, the park and commons could schedule regular weekly events featuring small singing or musical groups. In addition, community nonprofit organizations should be encouraged to use the Center of the City space for meetings and performances.

# Intermediate Plan

**Timeframe:** Beginning in Fiscal year 2022 (July 2021), and possibly continuing into FY 2023.

**Scope:** The Council of the Commons, in cooperation with the City Administrator, will participate in a comprehensive planning study guided by external professional expertise that includes robust community input to determine the intermediate and longer term development of the park and commons. We highly recommend that the Center of the City be viewed in the context of the growing network of pedestrian paths and bike lanes throughout the downtown, as well as the rapid increase in population associated with ongoing new housing development nearby.

**Recommendations:** The Library Lot surface parking area, Liberty Plaza and Library Lane will be viewed as an integrated space for planning purposes. Lessons learned from the Short Term implementation should be incorporated in the development of the Intermediate Plan. We strongly recommend that the Center of the City, through the auspices of the Council of the Commons, will play a central role in the planning and celebration of Ann Arbor's bicentennial in 2024.

# Long Term Plan

**Scope:** The results of the comprehensive planning study as well as what we learn from the initial activation of the park and commons will greatly influence the form and nature of the Center of the City for Ann Arbor's third century. Our collective goal is for the Center of the City to become an enduring community asset that will feature experiences to be enjoyed by all segments of our community.

**Recommendations:** The Council of the Commons should set a high priority on building a strong, dynamic and robust public/private partnership for the benefit of the Center of the City. The active involvement and support of several components of city government including the City Council, City Administrator, Parks Department, Planning Department and the DDA will be critical to the long term success of the park and commons. In addition, private citizens, local businesses, community groups, public institutions and philanthropic organizations should be actively engaged in an ongoing way with the visioning, planning, and implementation processes.

**Conclusion:** The city of Ann Arbor possesses the energy, imagination, talent and resources to develop the Center of the City as an enduring legacy for future generations to both treasure and enjoy. Now is the moment to seize this opportunity!

# Context from Task Force Survey Results

**\*\*A sample of quotes from community members who responded to the Task Force survey question 2, “What experiences support your ideal commons?”:**

<https://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/programs/Documents/E.b%20Online%20Survey%20Results.pdf>:

"A plaza with a central feature such as a fountain, gazebo, bandstand, perhaps with some greenery or plantings on the outside. It should be inviting as a place to cross diagonally, so that people could see each other in passing, and there could be a few benches or low walls to sit on and perhaps a place for a couple of food or coffee vendors. It should be a versatile space where various community events could be held. It should be beautiful and simple."

"Green space with trees, and a water feature like a splash pad for kids to play in and adults to enjoy. A few park benches. Maybe a small refreshment stand. Something that is designed to attract all ages, and designed to unwind and detach from the fast pace of the city."

"Pedestrian space that can be covered if needed in spots. Comfortable spaces to sit, plants, maybe vendors."

"I really like the look & feel of these urban trail systems that cities are converting rail lines into, while I know the Center of the City isn't a trail, I think some visual inspiration can be brought in from them."

"A Town Square with some green space where people can relax and/or take part in activities. Friendly open atmosphere."

"A representation of what I like best about Ann Arbor - a beautiful, somewhat eclectic space to gather peacefully with others in a tree-filled informal space that celebrates our diverse community."

"It looks like a place open and inviting to all -- with plants -- trees, grass, anything green -- adding oxygen to the air. Park benches, Flowers. A place to eat your lunch on break from work. Trash and recycling cans both if any waste is left from your lunch. A green space -- a city "lung" like central park -- in the midst of buildings and cars and exhaust."

"A place open to all that encourages people from all backgrounds to mingle with each other to build bonds between individuals and groups."

"There should be trees for shade, a medium-sized amphitheater or band stand with lawns and some seating, walkways, and areas for community displays (art exhibits, farmer's market, ice or snow sculptures, school or community group decoration contests, etc.) A designated location for 2-3 food carts, also with



seating or adjoining the amphitheater seating would be nice. No or only one permanent art installation."

"I like the model (not exact, of course) of Campus Martius Park in Detroit; a permanent public space with changeable features for the seasons: ice rink in winter, "beach" with sand in the summer, outdoor seating and popup food stands/trucks, stage, etc. Hire employees to be a physical park presence for maintenance and serve as city ambassador/info center."

"I enjoy Campus Martius in Detroit, where the park has a mixed use for events, pop up shops, festivals and traditional park experience. I think it will be a huge swing and a miss for A2 if the park doesn't allow mixed use. Please do not let it become Liberty Plaza, a park that outside of sonic lunch has little public appeal."

"More of a plaza or public square than an actual "park." There should be significant planters for trees, shrubbery and flowers, ample seating and event space - perhaps a small stage with some permanent seating. A "snack bar" or food service of some sort should be provided. An ice-skating rink in the winter. Public restrooms. A children's play area."