

Downtown Detroit Visit Hosted by David Cowan from the DDP Friday, December 10, 2021

Council of the Commons members: Alice Ralph, Rita Mitchell, Frank Wilhelme

Downtown Development Partnership (DDP) staff members:
David Cowan, Derrick, Cliff, Sharon (full names to be confirmed)

DTE Beacon Park staff member: Eric

Note: We were struck by the fact that three parks, Capital Park (CP), Campus Martius Park (CMP) and Cadillac Square Park (CSP) were reclaimed from the early 20th Century's emphasis on motorized transportation. For example, both CP and CSP were public transportation hubs for many decades before they were reclaimed as parks and public spaces.



Grand Circus Park Panorama showing Tiger Stadium, Detroit Athletic Club, and Detroit Opera House

Grand Circus Park

We met David and his colleagues at the Russell Alger Fountain. David shared that GCP was part of the 1805 city of Detroit design following a fire that destroyed much of the city. The park was excavated in the 1950s for an underground parking structure. The park was rebuilt with soil depths of up to 20 ft above the ceiling of the structure. The deciduous trees present appear healthy and of sizes consistent with planting after the 1950s construction. The DDP has plans to make significant changes to the park over the next few years. Due to its proximity to Comerica park and other cultural assets, GCP hosts special events but doesn't have the volume of

activities of other downtown parks. It tends to have more incidents involving disturbances that spill out of adjacent night clubs.

Capitol Park

We moved on to Capitol Park which is part of an historic district and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Capitol Park Historic District is roughly bounded by Grand River, Woodward and Michigan Avenues, and Washington Boulevard.

The park is the site of Michigan's first capitol building which served that function during the territorial and early statehood periods. Stevens T. Mason, Michigan's first governor, is buried in the park in the base of a monument dedicated to him.

In 2009 a \$1.1 million renovation of the park was undertaken by the Downtown Development Authority. The park is a half acre triangular shaped parcel of land which was part of Augustus Woodward's original town plan.

The park is an integral part of its immediate neighborhood and serves largely as a passive recreation site. The park is primarily a hard surface area with the exception of a small dog park and several flower beds. The park has large permanently installed shade umbrellas and permanent fixed seating and



Capitol Park

combined wooden benches and tables. In many ways, the size and surfaces of the park reminds one of the Library Lane Parking structure's above ground parking area. DDP staff noted that current street level businesses were established following the park renovation, and are successful.



Capitol Park panorama, showing the Stevens T. Mason memorial (L), umbrellas, bench and moveable chairs.

Campus Martius Park

Campus Martius Park was lost in the 1900s as the city's downtown was reconfigured to accommodate increased vehicular traffic. Hart Plaza, along the riverfront, was designed to replace Campus Martius as a point of importance. But as Hart Plaza is a primarily hard-surfaced area, many residents came to lament the lack of true park space in the city's downtown area.



The new Campus Martius Park was dedicated November 19, 2004 and includes two performance stages, sculptures, public spaces, a seasonal ice rink and on-site Zamboni machine. At 1.2 acres, the park is smaller than its predecessor, as a full restoration of the original would have required the demolition of several buildings. However, the city increased the amount of park space in the area by constructing the new Cadillac Square Park, which opened in summer 2007, immediately to the east of Campus Martius. CMP is a major focal point of activity in downtown Detroit.

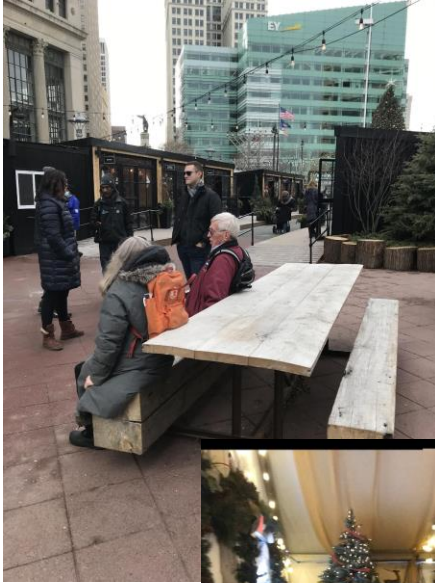
The ice rink is somewhat larger than the rink at Rockefeller Center in NYC

and is the featured winter activity. Also, the park is the location of the city's enormous Christmas Tree. The annual tree lighting attracts 75-100,000 people. The park also features a year-round indoor restaurant.

Cadillac Square Park

Cadillac Square Park is another re-established park in the area. It lies immediately to the east of Campus Martius Park. Until 2001, the area where the park is located was occupied by a bus transfer station constructed in the 1960s. From 1841 until 1891, Cadillac Square was the site of the Detroit Farmer's Market. The new park is site of the relocated Bagley Memorial Fountain which previously occupied a spot on Campus Martius. The dimensions of CSP are approximately 360 ft. by 60 ft.

On a seasonal basis it hosts a number of small heated businesses, many are start ups. The park also features the Cadillac Lodge. Making its first



appearance in the 2017-2018 holiday season, the Lodge is a staple of Campus Martius during the Christmas season.

This family-friendly pop up area features a large, heated tent filled with games, leather couches, and other ski-lodge-like amenities including a food service.

(<https://www.hourdetroit.com/shopping->



[retail/downtown-detroit-markets-to-return-for-2021-holiday-season/](https://www.hourdetroit.com/shopping-retail/downtown-detroit-markets-to-return-for-2021-holiday-season/))

Beacon Park

Beacon Park, created by DTE, is located on Grand River Avenue. It opened in July 2017 and occupies 1.2 acres on the near westside of downtown Detroit. While owned by DTE, the park is managed by the Downtown Detroit Partnership. The park features light installations, an open lawn space and a contemporary two-story restaurant. The park hosts a program of daily organized activities from musical performances and children's events, to art installations, local markets, exercise classes and more. Amenities at Beacon Park include on-site wifi and USB charging ports.

Beacon Park serves as a magnet for the community attracting over 3 million visitors since its opening as well as spurring new development in surrounding businesses.

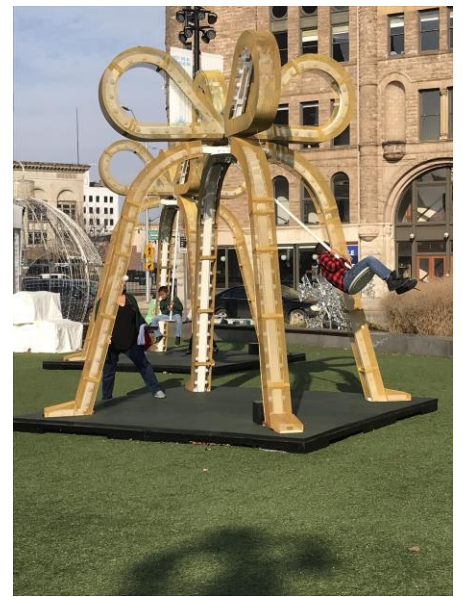


During the winter months, the park also features a large indoor heated space appropriate for a variety of activities. Beacon Park is an interesting example of a community asset provided by a single corporate entity. It serves as an example of how important that businesses are in establishing successful community assets.



Seating and swinging bells at Beacon Park

Summary of Observations and Learnings



It is clear that strong participation and support from the business community and especially businesses in close proximity to the parks are essential for long term success.

A strong working partnership between the city, the DDA, and in Ann Arbor's case, the AADL is essential for success. The scope of management responsibilities including event support, general maintenance, grounds upkeep, hosting and security need to be clearly defined. In Detroit, the Downtown Detroit Partnership, a business partnership is responsible for this management role.