



REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

RFI # X

Center of the City Design Process

DRAFT Version 2 – January 3, 2022

I. BACKGROUND:

The City of Ann Arbor is seeking information for a design process from interested planning, design and engineering firms regarding a design process for the Center of the City, which includes city-owned property on the block between 5th Avenue, William, Division, and Liberty Streets. Specifically, this includes Liberty Plaza, the surface of the Library Lane Parking structure and Library Lane, and Kempf House.

Interested firms are encouraged to outline a proposed approach for this endeavor along with an associated cost estimate. The information offered by your firm may assist the City in the procurement of a consultant team to complete this work through a subsequent request for proposals process.

The submittal of information to this RFI does not guarantee any award of a contract.

1. History

On November 6, 2018, voters approved Proposal A to amend the City Charter, which states that City-owned land bounded by Fifth Avenue, and William, Division and Liberty Streets, including Liberty Plaza, the surface of the Library Lane parking structure and Library Lane itself, shall be retained in public ownership, in perpetuity, and developed as an urban central park and civic center commons known as the “Center of the City.” The future of this block, especially the site commonly referred to as the “Library Lot,” the surface of the Library Lane underground parking structure, has been a focal point of community conversation, and often controversy.

For decades, both the City and citizen groups initiated planning processes, resulting in numerous reports and plans that expressed various visions for the block. Without a clear consensus, however, questions remained about the future of the block’s city-owned land. In recent years, this question came to a head with the prospect of a mixed-use development on the Library Lot site. To many members of the community, the development represented an opportunity for increased walkability, economic investment, and affordable housing in the downtown. Meanwhile, others viewed the development as taking away one of the few opportunities for retaining downtown public space, which was viewed by many as a much needed and desired community asset, and something that been fought for by some members of the community for many years. Ultimately, this led to the Proposal A citizen ballot initiative. With the passing of Proposal A, the direction of the block is now set in the direction towards a Center of the City urban park and civic center commons.

To advance the Center of the City Civic Center, In April 2019, Ann Arbor City Council passed resolution to establish the Center of the City Task Force with the charge “to engage citizens in visioning, long term planning, and immediate and intermittent uses, building toward the final vision for the Center of the City on the Library Block” The Task Force developed a report that provided an initial set of recommendations. The main body of the report can be found here: <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/programs/Pages/City-of-the-City->

[Task-Force.aspx](https://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/programs/Pages/Center-of-the-City-Report-Appendices.aspx) and the Appendix, which includes background documents and community engagement results, can be found here: <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/programs/Pages/Center-of-the-City-Report-Appendices.aspx>.

In response to the first recommendation in the Task Force report, *facilitate the formation of the Ann Arbor Council of the Commons*, the City has formed an official board called the Council of the Commons (<https://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/programs/Pages/Council-of-the-Commons.aspx>). The Council of the Commons is an advisory body to City Council and the City Administrator that is charged with building upon the work of the Center of the City Task Force by providing written recommendations annually on such subjects as funding needs, an operations and maintenance model, and the role of the Council of the Commons.

In response to the fifth recommendation in the Task Force Report, *authorize initial planning for the development of the public spaces on the Center of the City Block*, City Council has allocated funding, with a call for match funding from interested private entities, to complete a design process for the Center of the City. This RFI is the start of that process.

2. Project Goals

Design

- An inspired design that is also grounded in engineering realities.
- A community supported design for the block that proposes ways for the Center of the City to:
 - Be more physically accessible.
 - Create and enhance multi-modal transportation connections to, from, and within the block, especially to and from other key destination points and the public spaces on the block. This could include pathways, bike lanes, transit, tunnels, and skyways.
 - Include adaptable spaces that can support various activities and functions, such as performances and speakers.
 - Offer relaxing green space, including gardens.
 - Include a water feature if feasible.
 - Provide an active play area.
 - Include seating and tables.
 - Potentially provide public restrooms.
 - Serve as a community gathering space.
 - Support social, economic, and environmental sustainability, ultimately providing a sustainable legacy for future generations.
 - Maintain the structural integrity and functioning of the parking structure.
 - Ensure safe pedestrian access in and out of structure.
 - Account for on-going maintenance needs (e.g. trash and snow removal)
 - Serve as an inclusive space that honors human dignity.
 - Help ensure safety for users of the block and parking structure.
 - Be interesting and beloved – serve as a signature city space that is welcoming, fosters delight, fuels imagination, and encourages community connections and care.

Process

- A design process that includes a high level of transparent and meaningful community engagement using an equitable engagement approach that:
 - Embraces the gifts of diversity.
 - Acknowledges and addresses the role of race, power, and injustice.
 - Helps build trust by providing real opportunity for input.
 - Honors varying opinions.
 - Adapts to community needs.

Implementation

- Implementation recommendations that include:

- Cost estimates for the proposed design elements.
- Potential funding mechanisms
- Suggested phasing

3. Site Details

The Block

- The block is within the Downtown Development Authority District and located just two blocks from the Main Street Business District and three blocks from State Street Business District, and the University of Michigan Central Campus.
- The block includes Liberty Plaza, the Kempf House, the Ann Arbor District Library Downtown branch, restaurants, Denali Loft, and the Library Lot.
- Protected bike lanes were recently installed on Division and William Street.

The Library Lot

- The Library Lot is about an acre in size.
- The parcel ID number 09-09-29-403-012.
- The Ann Arbor District Library Downtown branch is immediately adjacent to the south of the lot and considered a key stakeholder in this effort.
- The Library Lot is currently being used for vehicle parking as the top of an underground parking structure. It is anticipated that parking would be removed from the surface of the structure, but the remaining levels in the structure will still provide parking.
- The parking structure includes an elevator enclosure and a ramp to the underground levels of the structure, which must stay in place.
- The parking structure was originally designed to support a building.
- Removal or damage to the existing pavement will void the waterproof warranty.
- The existing trees are strategically located on the site.
- The Stormwater system in place was designed for current & anticipated use.
- Electricity and water are available, but in limited locations.

Liberty Plaza

- Liberty Plaza is a .26-acre urban plaza is located next to the Kempf House on the corner of Division and Liberty ([Click here to view a printable map of Liberty Plaza \(pdf\)](#)).
- The plaza has two levels with benches and planters with landscaping.
- A public drinking fountain is available at Liberty Plaza.
- Sometimes a portable restroom is placed at Liberty Plaza.
- Liberty Plaza is managed by the city's Parks Department.
- Events, such as Sonic Lunch and Pizza Fridays, take place at Liberty Plaza.

Kempf House

- Kempf House is a public museum built in 1853, was home to the Kempfs, a German-American Family who lived and worked in the 1890's.
- More information about the Kempf House can be found at: <http://www.kempfhousemuseum.org/>.

4. Engagement Expectations and Involved Parties

It is critical for this effort to have an equitable engagement approach that is highly inclusive of members of our community that have historically had limited participation city decision-making processes. Keeping this as the central tenet and top priority of the engagement process, the engagement approach must also include the following interested and affected parties:

- Council of the Commons – A city board that plays an advisory role to City Council and the City Administrator regarding the future of the Center of the City Civic Center

Commons. <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/programs/Pages/Council-of-the-Commons.aspx>

- Parks Advisory Commission – A city commission that plays an advisory role to City Council on park matters. This group currently provides advisory direction on Liberty Plaza and Kempf House. <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/Parks-Recreation/administrative/pages/parks-advisory-commission.aspx>
- Planning Commission – A city commission enabled by the state planning act that provides direction on land use and oversees the city's Master Plan. <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/planning/development-review/Pages/CityPlanningCommission.aspx>.
- Downtown Development Authority – The block is within their district and they manage the parking structure. <https://www.a2dda.org/>
- Ann Arbor District Library - The Ann Arbor District Library Downtown branch is immediately adjacent to the south of the Library Lot. <https://aadl.org/>
- Library Green Conservancy – A nonprofit that organized to create an urban park and civic center next to the downtown branch of the Ann Arbor District Library. The Library Green Conservancy is represented by two members on the Council of the Commons. <https://a2centralpark.org/>
- Initiating Committee – A nonprofit that organized to activate the Center of the City and advance the understanding and implementation of community commons. Members of the Initiating Committee overlap with the Library Green Conservancy. The Initiating Committee is also represented by two members on the Council of the Commons. <https://annarborcommunitycommons.org/>.
- The Ride – Also known as the Ann Arbor Area Transit Authority (AAATA). AAATA's main terminal is located across the street on 5th Street. <https://www.theride.org/>.
- Ann Arbor Housing Commission – Ann Arbor Housing Commission (AAHC) seeks to provide desirable housing and related supportive services for low-income individuals and families on a transitional and/or permanent basis and is currently in the process of preparing a property for development across 5th Street, next to the The Ride's terminal (known as the old YMCA lot). <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/Housing/Pages/default.aspx>.
<https://www.a2gov.org/departments/planning/Pages/Public-Engagement-for-Use-of-Vacant-City-Owned-Lots.aspx>
- The Treeline – The Treeline Project is a proposed urban trail that is meant to provide a non-motorized transportation facility through downtown connecting people to key destinations along the way. The city is currently working with a non-profit called the Treeline Conservancy to help advance this project. <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/systems-planning/programs/Pages/Allen-Creek-Greenway-Master-Plan-Project.aspx>.
<https://thetreeline.org/>.
- Main Street Association – Main Street Area Association is a membership based association of local business, organizations, and individuals committed to the long term success and vitality of Downtown Ann Arbor. <https://mainstreetannarbor.org/about>.
- State Street District – The State Street District represents the neighborhood to various government bodies and works closely with public agencies, the University of Michigan, the DDA, and other downtown associations in order to sustain an economically strong environment for area businesses. <https://statestreetdistrict.org/>.
- Kerrytown – A prominent shopping and gathering hub in Ann Arbor. <http://kerrytown.com/>.
- Equitable Ann Arbor Land Trust (EA2) – A recently formed non-profit working to address affordable housing.
- Businesses, property owners, and residents on the block that include, but are not limited to:

- Denali Lofts – A large residential structure on the block.
<https://www.apartments.com/denali-lofts-ann-arbor-mi/00sm5r3/>.
- First Martin Corporation – A major property owner on the block.
<https://www.firstmartin.com/>
- Ann Arbor SPARK – An economic development agency located next to Liberty Plaza. <https://annarborusa.org/>

II. DISCLAIMER:

The City shall not in any way be liable or responsible for cost incurred in responding to this RFI. All information received in response to this RFI becomes the exclusive property of the City. All responses to this RFI become matter of public record and shall be regarded as public records. The City shall not in any way be liable or responsible for the disclosure of such records, including, with limitation, those so marked, if disclosure is required by law, or by any order of a court of competent jurisdiction.

III. INSTRUCTIONS:

Respondents shall include a letter of interest, qualifications, an overview of a proposed design process approach to help meet project goals, and a general cost estimate for the proposed approach. If possible, include information on similar projects completed by your firm.

IV. NOTICES:

This is not a Request for Proposal. The purpose of this RFI is to gather information to potentially solicit a Request for Proposal. No award will be made based on the results of this process. Any procurement by the City will be the subject of a separate process and subject to budget approval.

V. DEADLINE TO SUBMIT RESPONSES:

Responses to this RFI are due by **X**. Responses shall be sent via email to: cspencer@a2gov.org or by delivery to:

City of Ann Arbor Purchasing Department
Attn: Colin Spencer, Purchasing Manager, RFI# **X**
301 East Huron Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48107

Any questions should be sent in writing before **close of business on X** to Colin Spencer, Purchasing Manager via email to cspencer@a2gov.org.