

Park Advisory Commission Recommendation for Redevelopment of Liberty Plaza and Development of the Library Lot

Whereas, the Park Advisory Commission (PAC) was asked to make recommendations for development of five city owned parcels in the downtown regarding use as public open space in late 2012,

Whereas, PAC formed a subcommittee to study this topic and spent 9 months holding 11 public meetings, attending “placemaking” workshops, and conducting a resident survey with over 1,600 respondents, and reported their findings to PAC for approval in October of 2013,

Whereas, the Downtown Parks Subcommittee Report was accepted by city council in November of 2013,

Whereas, the report contains the following recommendations in regards to downtown parks and open space:

1. The development of any new downtown park or open space should prioritize community preferences. The most commonly expressed community-based priorities include: a central location; sufficient size for passive recreation/community gatherings; shade; and natural features.
2. New downtown parks and open space should adhere to placemaking principles. Necessary criteria for a successful downtown open space include: high traffic/visibility; flexible programmable space; active use on at least three sides; the ability to provide activities desired by the community; and funding for maintenance and security.
3. Any additional downtown park space should not come at the expense of the quality or maintenance of Ann Arbor’s existing parks. Downtowns parks are expected to be more costly to develop and maintain. Further, existing downtown parks are not currently utilized to their potential. Given the limits of current parks funding, the development of new parks should not be approved without an identified funding source for capital development, ongoing maintenance, and programming.
4. Significant capital/structural improvements to Liberty Plaza should only be made in concert with the adjacent property owner. Short-term efforts should continue to focus on smaller-scale incremental changes (removal of shrubbery) and programming opportunities (fee waiver). Future improvements should also work to create a permanent and highly visible connection between the Library Lot and Liberty Plaza.

Whereas, city council directed the city manager to list the Library lot for sale with a broker in April 2014,

Whereas, the listing states the property is to be developed as mixed-use including a 12,000 square foot public space to be developed at the expense of the developer,

Whereas, city council asked staff to provide a conceptual design for redevelopment of Liberty Plaza and development of the Library Lot that would provide a detailed estimated annual operating budget, along with funding scenarios, for the maintenance, security, and programming costs required to run two successful urban parks in the downtown and report back in January 2015,

Whereas, park staff would have to forego other projects already in process to complete this task in the current time allotted,

Whereas, placemaking principles specifically identify the importance of dedicated and sustained programming resources as vital components of successful urban public spaces,

Whereas, dedicated and sustained programming resources have not historically been allocated in direct support of Ann Arbor urban parks, especially Liberty Plaza,

Whereas, PAC recommends the formation of a subcommittee to study and specifically address the issues associated with Liberty Plaza and the Library Lot,

Whereas, PAC recommends that prior to any resource being allocated for redevelopment efforts directed at planning and redesign of either Liberty Plaza or the Library Lot, that resources, human, material, and financial be allocated or obtained to specifically oversee the programming of Liberty Plaza and the Library Lot for a period not to exceed one year in order to answer the following questions:

1. Determine costs for on-going dedicated resources (human, material, and financial) for programming of the spaces for one year, recognizing that key element for success of any urban park is sustained and meaningful programming of the space.
2. Determine the success of programming efforts and how the currently designed spaces function in support of that programming. What worked and didn't work?
3. Determine at the end of the study if issues long associated with Liberty Plaza are a function of design or the absence of sustained and meaningful programming, or a combination of both.
4. If shortcomings are design related, does it warrant a partial or complete redesign based on the outcomes of the study?
5. Determine what role adjacent and near by properties (public and private) have along with other downtown neighbors with regard to Liberty Plaza in determining key stakeholders for ongoing discussions.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, to reaffirm the purpose of PAC is to provide for public involvement in community park and recreation services and to provide advisory recommendations to the Manager of the Department of Parks and Recreation, City Administrator and Council regarding parks administration,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that PAC recommends that Council accept the above recommendations and direct staff and PAC to answer these questions and report their findings no later than October 2015.