

FINAL REPORT OF THE CENTER OF THE CITY TASK FORCE

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DRAFT IN PROGRESS 2/18/2020

1. Executive Summary and Vision

In April 2019, Ann Arbor City Council passed resolution R-19-135 (see [Appendix C](#)) 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.” This Final Report of the Task Force includes “recommendations to help determine the next steps to advance the development of a central park and civic center commons known as the Center of the City.” The Task Force was tasked with submitting its report and recommendations to Council by February 28, 2020.

Background & Context:

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 (see [Appendix D](#) for a list of documents consulted by the Task Force). 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 in the downtown, and affordable housing, which is regarded as a critical need in Ann Arbor.

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 citizen ballot initiative in 2018 known as Proposal A (see [Appendix E](#)).

With the passing of Proposal A, the direction of the block is now set in the direction towards a Center of the City that consists of an urban park and civic center commons. The role of the Task Force was therefore to help engage the community to further shape this direction. This report is the result of that effort.

Report Function and Structure:

This report presents a vision and set of recommendations to guide City Council on next steps, as called for in the resolution establishing the Task Force, and should serve as an advisory document that suggests a path towards achieving the “Center of the City,” including an urban park and civic center commons.

The recommendations are the results of a compact, but rigorous, planning process that took into account past work, community member input, research, and expertise.

The recommendations as outlined below represent as close to a consensus as the Task Force could come.

The remaining sections of this report detail how our recommendations were formed, additional considerations and related appendices, including a summary of Task Force activities and community engagement efforts.



Birdseye photo of Library Block from southeast

Vision:

As community feedback was reviewed and ideas were discussed by the Task Force, a vision for the “Center of the City” began to form.

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.

2. Recommendations: Goals and Action Steps

The following summarized recommendations suggest next steps for City Council to advance the development of a central park and civic center commons on the three public spaces: Library Lot, Liberty Plaza, and Library Lane).

Set #1	Set #2	Meghan's Suggested compromise
<p>1. Remove ground-level parking on the Library Lane Commons Lot parking structure and begin efforts to redesign as an active public space.</p>	<p>1. Open the Commons: Let everyone in Ann Arbor and far and wide know the commons is open, after 10 years of indecision.</p> <p>Close the parking structure surface to public parking, have an Opening Event and commence efforts to activate and improve design of the entire commons space.</p> <p>Added Goal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> inform and engage the people of Ann Arbor in the opening and beginning co-creation and self management of the Ann Arbor Commons 	<p>#1: Close the parking structure surface to public parking and begin efforts to activate and redesign as an active commons space.</p> <p>This activity is assigned to the Ann Arbor Commons Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform, engage and regularly update the community in the activating, planning, designing, and governance of the commons
<p>2. Form the Ann Arbor Commons Council.</p> <p>This oversight group composed of community members will, in coordination with the City's Park department, govern all three public spaces and focus on creating structures for decision-making, coordinating programming activities, and raising funds to support activities</p>	<p>2. Initiate an Ann Arbor Council of the Commons</p> <p>This governing group, composed of community members will provide governance and guidance in the self management of the commonly pooled resources of the commons, creating democratic processes for decision making, coordinating programming and raising funds.</p>	<p>#2. Form the Ann Arbor Council of the Commons.</p> <p>In coordination with the City's Park department, this group of community members will provide governance and guidance in the self management of the commonly pooled resources of the commons, creating democratic processes for decision making, coordinating programming and raising funds to support activities.</p>

<p>3. Schedule regular meetings of the Library Block partners group.</p> <p>Chaired by the City Administrator, a group of representatives with a direct interest in the Library Block would meet regularly (semi-annually) to provide longer-term support for the design, development and funding for the Center of the City. Membership should include one representative from the following organizations: Downtown Development Authority, Ann Arbor District Library, Historic District Commission, First Martin Corporation, SPARK, Library Green Conservancy, AAATA, Government Services Administration, University of Michigan Credit Union, local business owners, and local residents.</p>	<p>3. Form a Government Liaison Committee.</p> <p>All relevant government agencies invited to appoint a liaison person to assist the Council of the Commons and community interest groups formed in the commons...and too meet periodically to evaluate plans and new ideas, to include, the City Administrator as chair, and a liaison from the City Council. Energy Commission, Sustainability Commission, Parks Commission, Downtown Development Authority, Ann Arbor District Library, Ann Arbor Area Transit Authority, Historic District Commission, and the Federal General Services Administration, Ann Arbor School District, Washtenaw County Commission.</p>	<p>3. Develop a process to include partner/neighbor input in the work of creating the commons.</p> <p>In order for the Commons to be successful, it is essential for partner voices to be heard. We are asking the City Administrator to develop a process to gather these important perspectives and share them with the Ann Arbor Council of the Commons, in order to support the long-term design, development, and funding for the Commons.</p> <p>This process could include the creation of a formal committee and/or regular meetings open to all partners.</p> <p>Partners include, but is not limited to, the following: Downtown Development Authority, Ann Arbor District Library, Library Green Conservancy, Energy Commission, Sustainability Commission, Parks Commission, Historic District Commission, First Martin Corporation, SPARK, Library Green Conservancy, AAATA, Government Services Administration, University of Michigan Credit Union, Federal General Services Administration, Ann Arbor School District, Washtenaw County Commission, local business owners, and local residents.</p>
<p>4. Authorize initial planning for long-term development of the Library Lot, Liberty Plaza, and Library Lane to meet community</p>	<p>4 Invite a "Community Neighbors and Partners Support Committee" to form.</p> <p>invite to include The Library Green Conservancy, The First Martin Corporation, The</p>	<p>"Community Committee" is incorporated in recommendation #3 above.</p>

<p>needs, including the following:</p> <p>4.1: Explore the potential for redevelopment of Liberty Plaza</p> <p>4.2: Negotiate potential agreements/easements that allow for future expansion of Liberty Plaza as an active public space.</p>	<p>University of Michigan Credit Union, Inter-Cooperative Council, Jerusalem Garden and other interested businesses, Ecology Center, TreeLine Conservancy, and other interested community groups and organizations.</p> <p>Invite the Library Green Conservancy to convene a first meeting for participants to discuss their potential relations and contributions to the commons, in the short term and over time.</p>	
	<p>5. Invite all who care to join in the long term visioning and development of the commons and potential it offers for Ann Arbor as a world city.</p>	<p>This is assigned as an action step for Ann Arbor Council of the Commons and is not included as a recommendation.</p>
	<p>Look to the 2024 bicentennial. Invite planning for long term development and expansion of the commons and its benefits in the wider community and the world.</p> <p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore redevelopment options for Liberty Plaza as a green garden and downtown treasure. • seek easements with all the neighbors so the Block becomes more connected and active. 	<p>This is assigned as an action step for Ann Arbor Council of the Commons and is not included as a recommendation.</p>

1. **Remove ground-level parking on the Library Lane Commons parking structure and begin efforts to redesign as an active public space.**

2. **Form the Ann Arbor Commons Council.**

This oversight group composed of community members will, in coordination with the City's Park department, govern all three public spaces and focus on creating structures for decision-making, coordinating programming activities, and raising funds to support activities.

3. Schedule regular meetings of the Library Block partners group. :

Chaired by the City Administrator, a group of representatives with a direct interest in the Library Block would meet regularly (semi-annually) to provide longer-term support for the design, development and funding for the Center of the City. Membership should include one representative from the following organizations: Downtown Development Authority, Ann Arbor District Library, Historic District Commission, First Martin Corporation, SPARK, Library Green Conservancy, AAATA, Government Services Administration, University of Michigan Credit Union, local business owners, and local residents.

4. Authorize initial planning for long-term development of the Library Lot, Liberty Plaza, and Library Lane to meet community needs, including the following:

- 4.1: Explore the potential for redevelopment of Liberty Plaza
- 4.2: Negotiate potential agreements/easements that allow for future expansion of Liberty Plaza as an active public space.

Below the Task Force provides additional information for each of the recommendations listed above. This includes high-level goals for the recommendations, as well as additional actions that will help to inform each recommendation.



Working map of Library Block. The Task Force utilized the map shown above when considering physical determinants on the Library Block. It shows existing structures and pathways and the location of adjacent historic districts. (Historic districts shown as colored areas).

Recommendation #1: Remove ground-level parking on the Library Lot parking structure and begin efforts to redesign as an active public space.

Goals:

1. Design and update spaces to be physically accessible
2. Create and foster flexible, safe, and adaptable spaces that can support various activities and functions
3. Designate a space for public discourse

Action steps:

1. Based on community input, explore cost-effective additions to the Library Lot to create a green space, such as container gardens.
2. Design mechanisms (for example, a natural barrier or artistic fence) to ensure the safety of users of the spaces, especially along Fifth Avenue, Library Lane, and the entrance to the parking ramp for the parking structure.
3. Create a flexible platform or stage area for use by speakers, demonstrators, and performers.
4. Create a power source for microphones and other resources that will support this function.
5. Repurpose or purchase flexible furniture for the spaces that are accessible and will accommodate year-round individual and group activities
6. Create a storage area for furniture and other needs
7. Install indoor public restrooms
8. Install a drinking fountain
9. Investigate free wifi for the entire space
10. Add recycling, composting, and trash receptacles to accommodate increased activity and potential food/vendor purchases

Recommendation #2: Form the Ann Arbor Commons Council.

Goals:

1. Develop programming, educational opportunities, activities and structures for the spaces that have broad community appeal
2. Define the “Culture of the Commons”
3. Foster partnerships that will create financial sustainability

Action steps:

1. Create a resolution that forms the Ann Arbor Commons Council. The Commons Council would be composed of community members and partners of all ages and backgrounds who volunteer to undertake the responsibilities of bringing the Commons into existence. The Commons Council would be charged with the following:
 - a. Educating themselves about commons and commoning
 - b. Creating structures for decision-making following the principles of the Commoning movement.
 - c. Developing a code of conduct for the space that upholds principles of mutual respect and the practical knowledge of intergroup relations,
 - d. Developing and creating inclusive programming activities in partnership with community groups and government agencies, including the City Parks Department

- e. Raising funds to support programming activities
 - f. Continuing community engagement to gather programming ideas
 - g. Developing an assessment strategy to ensure programming is inclusive, welcoming, and meets the needs of the users
2. Form partnerships to coordinate opportunities on topics that support the vision of the Commons (for example, wellness, gardening, exercise, art, music, volunteerism, civics, energy efficiency, Ann Arbor History, sustainable technology, permaculture, etc.)
 3. Use Library Lot, Liberty Plaza, and Library Lane as spaces to pilot programming.

(See Appendix F for more information on the proposed governance model)

Recommendation #3: Schedule regular meetings of a Library Block partners group.

Goals:

1. Create and enhance connections between representatives of all spaces on the Center of the City block
2. Foster partnerships that will create financial sustainability

Action steps:

1. Create a resolution that forms Library Block partners group and charge the group with the following:
 - a. Establish long-term support toward implementing design and funding of the Center of the City
 - b. Establish a public/private partnership structure designed to generate private revenues and solicit donor funding for the final Library Lot and Liberty Plaza.
2. As the role of the public spaces on the Library Block becomes clear over the next few years, study the need for and feasibility of a multi-use civic commons building as part of the Commons, taking into account near-term and future community needs, as well as existing infrastructure..
3. Based on community input, determine the best opportunities for a playground and/or public art that can function as a play structure that brings people of all ages together.

(See Appendix F for more information on the proposed governance model)

Recommendation #4: Authorize initial planning for the long-term development of the Library Lot, Liberty Plaza, and Library Lane to meet community needs.

Recommendation #4.1: Explore the potential for redevelopment of Liberty Plaza.

Recommendation #4.2: Negotiate potential agreements/easements that allow for future expansion of Liberty Plaza as an active public space.

Goals:

1. Design and update spaces to be physically accessible.
2. Design the public spaces with a variety of transportation options that encourages people to move through them at all times of the day and foster natural “eyes in the park.”
3. Create and foster flexible, adaptable spaces that can support various activities and functions
4. Create and nurture environmentally sustainable spaces
5. Create a sustainable, relaxing green space

6. Create an active play area.
7. Create and enhance connections between all spaces on the Center of the City block

Action steps:

1. Work with local experts (for example, eco-landscapers, permaculturists and soil scientists) to identify the best opportunity for green space locations and types of sustainable plantings within the Center of the City block.
2. Based on community input, utilize the City's Department of Sustainability and other community partners to plan and install renewable energy sources to the extent feasible
3. Work with local disability advocates and urban design consultants to determine potential improvements, layouts, and designs for all the spaces in the commons.
4. Work with a consultant and partners to assess opportunities to increase safety through environmental design, including considerations of lighting and sightlines.
5. Enhance the connections between the public spaces and other adjacent properties (the Kempf House, the Blake Transit Center, the Ann Arbor District Library Downtown branch, neighboring restaurants, the Denali building and First Martin-owned properties) by investigating landscaping, art, and design opportunities, including enhancing pedestrian pathways through the spaces
6. Work with First Martin to identify opportunities to increase physical and visual connections between their building and the public spaces (Liberty Plaza, Library Lot, and Library Lane), in order to better activate the space, such as ground-floor night-time businesses (e.g., coffee shop, bookstore).
7. Work with transportation planning experts to study opportunities for pedestrian accessibility and safety improvements for streets that border the Center of the City block (Fifth Avenue, William Street, Division Street, Liberty Street, and Library Lane)
8. Establish a mid-block pedestrian connection between Liberty Street, Library Lane, and William Street.
9. Create a pedestrian "overpass" over the central parking entrance ramp in order to facilitate pedestrian movement through the block, increase usable space, and potentially create better connections to Liberty Street between Liberty Plaza and the Library Lot.
10. Work with the DDA, AAATA, and mobility-focused groups to strengthen transportation links to and from the spaces.
11. Negotiate for public use of the Noble House and/or Carriage House.
12. As circumstances change, pursue land acquisitions to expand green space on the Center of the City block.
13. Designate a space that will accommodate food trucks and/or other temporary vendors based on community input.

3. What informed these recommendations

- **Listening to feedback from the community.**

Our proposed recommendations were informed from what we heard from our fellow community members about the future of the Center of the City. Feedback was gathered during our two open houses, our two DecaDome/IdeaPod engagements, our online survey, conversations with neighbors, guest speakers at our meetings, and emails from community members. For more information about our community engagement activities, please see [Appendix B](#).

- **Building on past work.**

In order to honor previous community efforts and city research, the Task Force built our recommendations on the foundation of previous work and conversations related to the Center of the City. Please see [Appendix D](#) for a list of reference materials provided to the Task Force.

- **Learning more about commons and commoning:**

The resolution establishing the Task Force defines a commons as: “a traditional form of shared space based on mutual benefit, mutual responsibility and mutual respect, conveying a culture of sustainability now and for generations to come.”

To further the group’s understanding of a commons, the Task Force met with researcher, professor and author on the history of commons and commoning, Peter Linebaugh, in addition to receiving information from Geoffrey Henny, Professor of Economic, Business Studies and Sustainability Innovation at Cleary University. The Task Force was also encouraged to read a selection from *Governing the Commons, the Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action Principles of the Commons* by Elinor Ostrom (winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics).

Examples of active commons include:

- Driemasterpark in the City of Ghent, Belgium. This park is on a former industrial site and managed by neighboring residents.
- Bologna, Italy, which launched “the city as a commons” project in 2014, which establishes a legal and administrative framework for citizens to care for urban spaces. A tool used as part of this is a “collaboration pact,” which establishes rules between stakeholders.
- Other examples of pioneering Commoning cities include Ithaca, Ghent, Bologna, Barcelona, Frome, Bristol, Amsterdam, Marseille, Grenoble, Lyon, and Seoul.

In summary, the Task Force learned that commons and commoning is a movement based on the concept of community assets being held in common (not privately owned) and these assets being collectively managed. The commons movement calls for a commitment to a shared set of values and norms, long-term stewardship, and little reliance on the private sector and the government.

To see other resources consulted by the Task Force on commoning, see [Appendix D](#).

- **Learning more about designing public spaces.**

To further the Task Force’s understanding about urban design, we consulted the Project for Public Spaces (PPS), a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping people create and sustain

public spaces that build strong communities, deems the following as the four key attributes to successful spaces.

1. Sociability
2. Uses & Activities
3. Access & Linkages
4. Comfort & Image

As stated by PPS:

Great public spaces are those places where celebrations are held, social and economic exchanges occur, friends run into each other, and cultures mix. They are the “front porches” of our public institutions – libraries, field houses, schools – where we interact with each other and government. When these spaces work well, they serve as the stage for our public lives.

In evaluating thousands of public spaces around the world, PPS has found that to be successful, they generally share the following four qualities: they are accessible; people are engaged in activities there; the space is comfortable and has a good image; and finally, it is a sociable place: one where people meet each other and take people when they come to visit.

Taking this a step further, PPS also defines what makes for successful public squares. According to their analysis, there are ten principles for supporting successful public squares (adapted from <https://www.pps.org/article/squaresprinciples>):

1. **Image & Identity:** Historically, squares were the center of communities, and they traditionally helped shape the identity of entire cities. The image of many squares was closely tied to the great civic buildings located nearby, such as cathedrals, city halls, or libraries.
2. **Attraction & Destinations:** Many great squares have a variety of smaller “places” within it to appeal to various people. Creating ten good places, each with ten things to do, offers a full program for a successful square.
3. **Amenities:** A square should feature amenities that make it comfortable for people to use. A bench or waste receptacle in just the right location can make a big difference in how people choose to use a place.
4. **Flexible Design:** The use of a square changes during the course of the day, week, and year. To respond to these natural fluctuations, flexibility needs to be built in. Instead of a permanent stage, for example, a retractable or temporary stage could be used.
5. **Seasonal Strategy:** Great squares such as Bryant Park, the plazas of Rockefeller Center, and Detroit’s new Campus Martius change with the seasons. Skating rinks, outdoor cafés, markets, horticulture displays, art and sculpture help adapt our use of the space from one season to the next.
6. **Access:** To be successful, a square needs to be easy to get to. The best squares are always easily accessible by foot: Surrounding streets are narrow; crosswalks are well marked; lights are timed for pedestrians, not vehicles; traffic moves slowly; and transit stops are located nearby.
7. **The Inner Square & the Outer Square:** The streets and sidewalks around a square greatly affect its accessibility and use, as do the buildings that surround it. An active, welcoming outer square is essential to the well-being of the inner square.
8. **Reaching out Like an Octopus:** Just as important as the edge of a square is the way that streets, sidewalks and ground floors of adjacent buildings lead into it. Like the tentacles of an octopus extending into the surrounding neighborhood, the influence of a good square (such as Union Square in New York) starts at least a block away.
9. **The Central Role of Management:** The best places are ones that people return to time and time again. The only way to achieve this is through a management plan that understands and promotes ways of keeping the square safe and lively. For example, a good manager understands existing and potential users and gears events to both types of people.

10. Diverse Funding Sources: A well-managed square is generally beyond the scope of the average city parks or public works department, which is why partnerships have been established to operate most of the best squares in the United States. These partnerships seek to supplement what the city can provide with funding from diverse sources, including--but not limited to--rent from cafés, markets or other small commercial uses on the site; taxes on adjacent properties; film shoots; and benefit fundraisers.

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4. Additional Considerations

Affordable housing:

As part of our community engagement efforts, the Task Force heard many voices calling for more affordable housing in downtown Ann Arbor. It is important to acknowledge this perspective in our report. The Task Force recognizes the urgent need for additional affordable housing in our community, but at this time, because of the wording of the resolution, creating housing on the Center of the City block is not an option. The Task Force strongly encourages City Council to continue to work to address the affordable housing shortage.

The importance of diverse perspectives:

As we planned and conducted our community engagement activities, it was important for the Task Force to hear a diverse set of voices and perspectives in order to inform our recommendations. To help with these efforts, we gathered demographic data at our open houses and through our online survey. In addition, we created a targeted mailing (see [Appendix B](#) about Task Force activities) and conducted outreach to specific communities such as those served by the DeLonis Center, the Native American Student Association, and the Neutral Zone.

As the work of creating the Commons continues, it will be important for the groups charged with stewarding the next steps develop mechanisms to ensure diverse perspectives and voices continue to be heard throughout the planning process.

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Appendix F . How to Begin.

The City Council acceptance of the recommendation to “Open the commons,” should invite those members of the Task Force and those who have participated in the Task Force meetings, who wish to undertake responsibility for initiations of the commons, to form a “Commons Convening Committee.”

The Commons Convening Committee would meet with the City Administrator, to identify those things the City will do in relation to the Task Force recommendations and other City Council instructions, to establish a working relationship and to establish a “commons fund” for the commons initiation.

The commons fund would include unspent funds from the Task Force allocation and City Staff support allocation, and any contribution negotiated with DDA responsive to the City Council resolution identifying surface parking revenues since November 6, 2018, less actual expenses, as properly allocated to commons development.

The Commons Convening Committee would write the public notices, press releases, invitations to the intergovernmental liaison group, community partnership group, advisors group, and convene the First Commons Assembly.

The Commons Convening Committee would contact potential partner commoning cities worldwide for advice and collaboration.

The Commons Convening Committee would prepare a Commoning “tutorial” and orientation materials.

The Commons Convening Committee would hire 2 full time equivalent staff positions to facilitate programming and have “eyes in the park.”

....

A good day to begin would be Wednesday April 1st, 2020.

like an expanded meeting of our task force on the Library Lot, open invitation, 4pm to sundown.

(April Fools’ Day, to keep a smile on the face.

(with rain day alternatives, including request for Downtown Library rain day “lobby use”)

Invitation to everyone: to hear an opening report, speak ideas and questions, form interest groups on topics about which people attending express special interest, to schedule follow up meetings of interest groups.* (Ways of remote participation would be provided.)

At the First Assembly people would be asked to discuss how to form a Council of the Commons, as a governing and oversight responsible group, and who might be interested in being an on-going member.

Attention would be given to organizing a Commons Bank and community value exchange system.

At the First Assembly people would be asked how to celebrate the opening of the commons at the upcoming scheduled activities on the commons, being Earth Day Week April 19-26, and Blooms Day in May.

The Commons Convening Committee would write and circulate a report of the First Assembly, describing a commons communication and deliberation process, working group meeting calendar, economic arrangements, and the schedule for a Second Assembly, (by Memorial Day.)

A Second Assembly of the commons would consider the formal structure of the Council of the Commons, with participation of inter-governmental liaison, community partners, working groups, advisors, and the assembly itself.**

After the Second Assembly, the Commons Initiation Committee would prepare a report to the City Administrator and City Council describing Initiating activities undertaken and a proposed operations plan for the 2020-2021 Fiscal Year.

*** past experience suggests interest groups would form around,
greening and gardening
children and play
food foodand health**

**people care, services and helping
appropriate technology and climate consciousness
arts, artists and performance spaces
future Civic Center Building
hearing under-heard voices**

**** The formal structure of “governing the commons” will be an on-going study question. It is likely that the Council of the Commons will include some kind of provisional executive committee, with representative voices from all the interested elements: governmental liaison committee, community neighbors and partners, working groups, advisors and the convening committee itself.**

Appendix A: [Recommendations and responsible parties](#)

Appendix B: Activities of the Task Force:

In accordance with the resolution establishing the Task Force, two Council Members serving on the Parks Advisory Commission appointed nine community members to the Task Force and an additional two members of City Council to serve as advisory members. The Task Force is comprised of members who have expertise in urban planning, architecture, economics, library science, strategic planning, teaching, political science, social justice, and activism. The Task Force also includes two students, one from Community High School and one from the University of Michigan.

Members of the Center of the City Task Force:

Hannah Boettcher
Ann Dilcher
Alan Haber
John Haines
Jeff Hayner (Council member)
Miles Klaphor, Vice Chair
Carolyn Loh
Meghan Musolff, Chair
Chip Smith (Council member)
Norman Tyler
Dean Yang



Members of the Task Force

Planning Process

The Center of the City Task Force followed a five step planning process that was designed to work directly with the community, ensuring concerns and aspirations were understood and considered as various options were explored. The planning process steps included:

1. Gathering and reviewing information on past planning efforts and the block's history
2. Soliciting ideas and thoughts from the community and topical experts
3. Developing preliminary goals and objectives based on community input, research, and relevant expertise
4. Collecting feedback on outstanding questions to further shape the recommendations
5. Developing, vetting, and revising recommendations to finalize the report

Regular Task Force Meetings

Beginning in August 2019, the Task Force typically met every other week on Wednesdays. In total, there were fifteen Task Force meetings. All Task Force meetings were open to the public and notified through postings, the project website, and the City calendar. With the exception of the initial meeting and a meeting that required a room change, meetings were recorded by the Community Television Network (CTN), the local public access television station, and can be found at www.a2gov.org/departments/communications/ctn and the project webpage, www.a2gov.org/citycenter.

Guest speakers

At several meetings, the Task Force invited experts to share information. The topics and experts included:

- Safety: Officer Jeffrey Rork
- Urban Design & Climate Change: Doug Kelbaugh
- Sustainability: John Mirsky
- Commons Concepts: Peter Linebaugh
- Historic Preservation: John Beeson

In addition to invited speakers, various community members also shared their expertise and thoughts with the Task Force via the open comment periods at our regular Task Force meetings.

Links to meeting materials, including agendas, minutes, notes and speaker presentations can be found on the Task Force website at www.a2gov.org/citycenter.

Task Force Webpage

City staff created a Center of the City project webpage as part of the City's overall website: www.a2gov.org/citycenter. This page included background information about the project and Task Force, links to related City documents, and information about each meeting. Additionally, the webpage provided a link for community members to sign up for updates.

Task Force Email

Community members could send messages to the Task Force through the Staff Liaison either at the Liaison's email or a Task Force specific email: CityCenterTF@a2gov.org. These emails were forwarded to the full Task Force and saved in the Task Force accessible Project Management site.

Neighbor Outreach

A Task Force subgroup conducted a series of interviews to hear the perspectives of neighboring entities and groups (see [Appendix G for the invitation](#)). These interviews included perspectives from the following organizations and/or community groups:

- Ann Arbor Public Library
- Downtown Development Authority
- Ann Arbor Transit Authority
- Kempf House
- Neighboring Business Owners
- Neighboring Residents

At these interviews, Task Force members listened to perspectives about the history and potential future of the space and asked participants to give feedback on proposed activities, examples of urban parks, and potential plans.

Community Open Houses

The Task Force held two Open Houses to gather community feedback. The Open Houses were advertised through posting on social media, email notifications, the project website, the City calendar, and printed flyers (see [Appendix G](#) for a copy of the flyer).

Both Open Houses had the purpose of:

- Building trust in the process.
- Fostering a feeling of co-creation within the community.
- Gathering community input and clarity on topics related to the concept of the commons and to inform the development of conceptual proposals for the space.
- Using the feedback gathered to help inform Task Force recommendations to City Council.

The first Open House was held on November 6, 2019 at the Downtown Library and had about 150 participants. The format of the Open House involved four stations, staffed by 1-2 Task Force members. Station topics included defining the commons, identifying potential users of the commons, reviewing images of example urban parks, and completing a survey about potential activities in space. The Open House also included a PowerPoint presentation illustrating the history of the Library Lot and Library Block from the 1950s to the current time through maps and photos. (See [Appendix G](#) for a copy of the powerpoint presentation)

The stations included:

1. Welcome Station: Staff at this station welcomed participants, oriented them to the open house, and encouraged participants to sign-up for Task Force updates.
2. Definition Station: At this station Task Force members gathered feedback about how participants define the commons, as well as what activities/experiences might support their ideal commons. To start the conversation, Task Force members provided a draft definition of a commons for review and asked participants to complete the following sentence “My ideal commons looks like…” and post answers to the questions:
 - o What activities support your ideal commons?
 - o What experiences support your ideal commons?
3. Audiences Station: The Task Force designed this station to help determine who might use this commons and what their ideal experience might be. The activity for this station involved completing an empathy map (see Appendix H).
4. Urban Spaces Station: At this station, Task Force members asked participants to review images of ten examples urban parks and provide feedback and complete a survey that asked participants to rate a list of proposed activities and provide additional activity ideas (see Appendix I for the survey).

The second Community Open House was held on January 15, 2020 at SPARK, located adjacent to Liberty Plaza and had about 75 participants. The format of this meeting included a welcome station and the following:

1. “What We’ve Heard” gallery walk: The Task Force printed “comment summary snapshots” (see page 22) and asked participants to provide feedback on what they most supported and if anything needed to be added. Participants could either write directly on the board or use sticky notes. This activity was intended to allow people to provide written feedback and/or an opportunity for people to give input if they were not able to stay for the whole meeting. Full page comments sheets were also made available to everyone as another means to provide written feedback.
2. Group conversation: The Task Force provided an opportunity for participants to have group conversations. Community members could join and leave the conversation groups as they wished and rotate among the groups. The conversation focused on outstanding questions, which included:

Discussion Topic #1: Civic Commons Building

We have heard enthusiasm for a Civic Center Commons building that would host activities such as:

*Commons decision making space
Cafe
Community theater auditorium
Celebration room
Art gallery and studio
Visitors’ center
Exhibitions
Help and information center office
Wireless hot spot
Meeting space and classrooms
Peace place*

Commons history records and archives

We have also heard that people want such a building to include additional private uses, such as housing and/or retail. To do this we would need an amendment to the existing City Charter. How do you think we should move forward and why?

Discussion Topic #2: Governance

We have heard that the community wants a space that is programmed, safe, inclusive, welcoming, maintained, and appropriately funded. What is the appropriate governance structure for this future Commons?

Some ideas and examples that we've heard include Public/private partnership, People's Park model (Berkeley, California, City-owned and managed).

Discussion Topic #3: Liberty Plaza

We have heard that Liberty Plaza is an existing park that is an important part of the City. What do you think is the role of Liberty Plaza as part of the Commons?

3. Share-out: At the end of the Open House, the Task Force community members to speak any thoughts they wished to share to the room of remaining Open House participants.

DecaDome/IdeaPod

Originally called the Decadome and eventually titled the Ideapod, this temporary structure served as an onsite repository at the Library Lot for community ideas and feedback. During the week of November 3-10, 2019, the same week as the first Community Open House, several Task Force members and the manufacturer of the Ideapod, staffed the structure from 11-2 each day. These volunteers invited those passing by to complete the activities survey (see Appendix G), and to submit any additional ideas or thoughts on poster boards mounted to the Ideapod. Community members completed 300 surveys and filled three poster boards.

During January 5-16, 2020, the days leading up to the second Community Open House. Task Force members and the Ideapod manufacturer once again staffed the structure from 11-2 each day, this time at Liberty Plaza, and invited community members to share their thoughts on Liberty Plaza and concepts being developed for the civic center commons.

Online Survey

The Task Force created an online survey that reflected the same questions that were asked at the November 6, 2019 Community Open House (see Appendix G for a copy of the survey questionnaire). City staff disseminated the survey through GovDelivery, a system used by the City, which sends survey invitations to over 6,000 subscribers. In addition, Task Force members sent invitations to their contacts and those that signed up through the project webpage.

In total, the survey received 534 responses.

Targeted mailings

In an effort to help ensure that a broad range of community members were included in the process, the Task Force developed a mailer that provided an update of Task Force activities and invited community members to the January 15, 2020 Open House, the remaining Task Force regular meetings, and/or to provide comment through email (See Appendix G for a copy of the mailer).

To accomplish this, the Task Force sent 6,500 mailers in late December/early January to households in areas of the City which, based on census data, have a higher concentration of people under 30 years,

incomes under \$50k, and people of color. According to demographic data collected at the first Community Open House and online survey, these were groups that were underrepresented in the process.

In addition to sending out 6,500 mailers through the mail, Task Force members distributed another 1,000 copies by hand.

Urban Spaces Preferences Survey

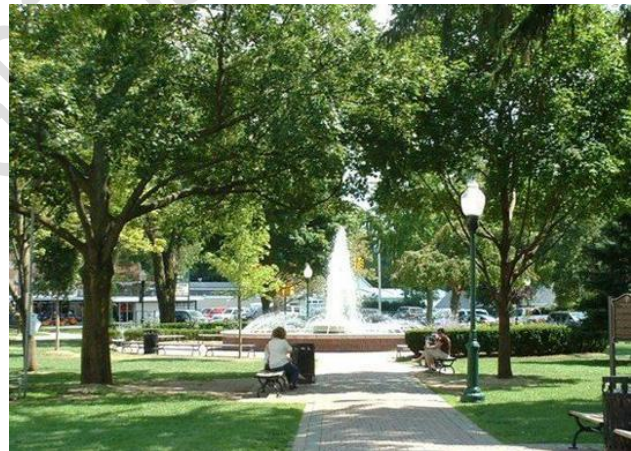
As part of outreach efforts, groups of invited residents and business owners/employees were shown photos of urban parks/plazas from twenty-eight different communities and asked to indicate their preferences based simply on each photo (see Appendix G). Nine of the twenty-eight photos received the highest evaluations. Although there was considerable variance in the responses, participants in the survey responded positively to images with the following characteristics:

- A balance of fountain, prominent sculpture, grassy and paved areas, trees, and ample seating (as illustrated in the consistently highest rated photo of Bhadra Fort Park, India)
- Integral paved walkways.
- Prominent trees (5 of the 9 spaces)
- A water feature (3 of the 4 most highly rated photos had a prominent water feature—generally a fountain)
- Prominent areas for sitting

Shown here are the two of the highest rated photos:



Bhadra Court, India



Plymouth, Michigan

A version of this exercise was also conducted at the first Open House hosted by the Task Force.

Activities Preferences Survey

Hundreds of citizens were given the opportunity to provide feedback on what activities could be considered for one of the Center of the City spaces through a survey that included twenty-three activities. This survey was an activity during the November Open House, included as part of the online survey, used in the Decadome/IdeaPod to gather feedback, and distributed in-person through various Task Force member conversations. Survey participants were asked to indicate how important each activity was to them.

The results of this survey indicated the two activities rated most highly were:

- Sit and talk with friends

- Visit the downtown library

Other activities that received high positive responses included (listed by priority):

- Sit and quietly read a book
- Listen to live music
- Have a drink at an indoor/outdoor cafe
- Use a public restroom
- Buy from a food vendor
- Experience a water

To see a copy of the survey and the compiled data, please [see Appendix G](#).

Alternative Conceptual Sketches

To encourage a broader perspective on the entire Library Block, seventeen sketches were developed by a Task Force member to offer a series of alternative concepts for review and discussion. These were published in an article in the Ann Arbor News and drew 82 comments from the public expressing a wide range of feedback. While the sketches were not prioritized by the Task Force, they did have an impact on our discussions and influenced the planning for our January Open House

The sketches can be found in [Appendix G](#).

Snapshot summaries:

The Task Force received thousands of comments through surveys, meetings, and email. To help manage this large amount of feedback for review and consideration, the Task Force organized the input into PPS' four key attributes for successful places in addition to the category of Carbon Neutrality to support the City's initiative to become carbon neutral by 2030. Community comments are therefore summarized under the following five categories and presented as "snapshot summaries" on the following pages.

1. Access and Linkages
2. Sociability
3. Comfort and Image
4. Uses and Activities
5. Carbon Neutrality

The Task Force also catalogued public spaces that community members offered as examples. A sampling of these examples are presented after the snapshot summaries.

Task Force work sessions

On January 10, 2020 and January 11, 2020, the Task Force held Work Sessions at the downtown branch of the Ann Arbor Public Library. These meetings were open to the public and notified through postings, the project website, and the City calendar. These were two hour sessions that involved a deep discussion on unsettled questions and the potential direction of the report. The Task Force used this discussion to formulate the structure and content of the January Open House.