

Geoff Henny Input to Ann Arbor City Center Commons Consolidated Document 2.2.2020

A Commons Definition from Bauwens and Vasilis

...**the Commons** are viewed as a shared resource, which is co-owned and/or co-governed by its users and/or stakeholder communities, according to its own rules and norms. It is therefore a combination of: an 'object' of cooperation, or resource, which is shared or pooled; an activity, i.e, **commoning** as the maintenance and co-production of that resource; and a mode of governance, the way decisions are made to protect the resource and allocate usage, which is related to property formats. Defined in such a manner it is clearly distinguishable from both the private and public/state forms of managing and owning resources. Commons can be found in every social arrangement, in every region and time period. This wider framework allows us to see the re-emergence of urban commons in our particular historical conjuncture. (Page 5) Changing Societies through Urban Commons Transitions *By Michel Bauwens and Vasilis Niaros P2P Foundation in collaboration with the Heinrich Boel Stiftung.*

<https://commonstransition.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Bauwens-Niaros-Urban-Commons-Transitions.pdf>

A Commons Definition by David Bollier in his book Free Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons. https://www.amazon.com/Free-Fair-Alive-Insurgent-Commons/dp/0865719217/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=Free%2C+Fair+and+Alive&qid=1580688645&sr=8-1 “**Commons** are a pervasive, generative, and neglected social lifeform. They are Complex, Adaptive, Living Processes that generate wealth (both tangible and intangible) through which people address their shared needs with minimal or no reliance on markets or states. A commons arises as people engage in the social practices of **Commoning**, participate in Peer Governance, and develop collaborative forms of Provisioning in the course of using a resource or care-wealth. While every commons is different, all ultimately depend on the physical gift of nature, and on sharing, collaboration, mutual respect and Gentle Reciprocity. A commons is constantly becoming. (From the Glossary)”

An Interpretation for the Ann Arbor City Center Commons

The experience and concept of a Commons for our purposes can be thought of as a Socio-Economic resource and activity space between government and the market. This space protects the interests and promotes the well being of ordinary citizens who collaboratively co-manage it in existing or potential associations of direct mutual interests, needs and endeavors. Its existence is widespread in different forms throughout the world and history (see the books of the Commons historian - and Ann Arbor resident - Professor Peter Linbaugh for an extensive review of that history https://www.amazon.com/s?k=Peter+Linbaugh&ref=nb_sb_noss_2 . Its main reason for being today is to counteract the tendency of monopolizing and highly unequal market forces to capture government at all levels to serve the wealthy and powerful at the

expense of the common citizen with limited means and frequently to the detriment of the environment on which we all depend for our survival. Commoning can be thought of as the activity of those existing or potential associations.

A key feature of the Commons is its independence from Government and the Market while collaborating with these entities. Another key feature is its independent access to resources and financing to ensure its co-equal status with government and business. This is often achieved through a public bank and parallel means of exchange, direct contributions from supporters and/or income/wealth generation from Commons activities. In the context of cities, the Commons and Commoning are now a worldwide movement that has emerged to combat the growing failure of the market and government at all levels to meet the needs and wants of their citizens. Those needs and wants can be summarized under two main headings. The first is a want for an engaged, compassionate, inclusive, and supportive community that moves away from purely transactional relationships among citizens towards caring and mutually supportive ones. The second is a need to reduce the extreme levels of inequality which are undermining the health, well being, prospects and environmental safety of a majority of their citizens. This is occurring in the context of a growing threat to all our survival from Climate Change and an accelerating inequality in a period of rapid technological change. This movement is led by cities such as Ghent, Seoul, Bologna, Barcelona, Frome, and Bristol who are experimenting with different models of the Commons and Commoning at the insistence of their stakeholders. Their current inspiration comes from the work of Economics Nobel prize winner Elinor Ostrom who studied many manifestations of the Commons and isolated key success factors. It also comes from the history of Commoning particularly in Europe and the many cooperative and commons ventures in the rest of the world that have been ably summarized in a book by David Bollier called [Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons](#) referred to above and in articles and studies found on the website of the P2P foundation <https://p2pfoundation.net/>.

With the creation of the City Center Commons, by popular vote, Ann Arbor has the opportunity - if it can evolve a bold enough vision and program - to leverage this effort to become the North American hub of the worldwide urban Commons movement. In so doing it can become a leader in the further development and definition of this movement in collaboration with potential new twinned or sister cities abroad. In so doing it will also fulfill its natural tendency to be at the forefront of inevitable societal and technological change, and ensure for itself a more resilient, caring, and participatory city. Finally, in so doing it will serve the interests and needs of all its people in this time of rapid change and peril when bold new experiments and forms of development and governance are called for.

The Ann Arbor City Center Commons Council

To achieve its long term potential, the Ann Arbor City Center Commons Council should become the body that oversees the evolution of that Commons - including having the

legally enshrined and independent control and responsibility for all assets and resources it acquires. To ensure that it models the best Commoning practices and the expectations of the voters, who passed the recent city ordinance, it might best evolve in the following manner. First a temporary Council should be created from among the citizens of Ann Arbor that have worked to bring it about. This temporary Council would then put in place preliminary agreed upon manifestations of the City Center Commons in being such as a non profit foundation with a bank account and day to day management and staff. It should also convene and help organize interest groups open to all in key areas such as green, food, alternative energy and waste management, funding, budgeting, oversight, public banking, liaison with community organizations and businesses, promotions, commoning project education, and care support. After a period not to exceed one year it should then develop an inclusive and democratic mechanism for succeeding itself using powerful new software tools that support such decision making such as www.loomio.org .