

**Ann Arbor Community Commons (A2C2)
Questions received from City staff on 08 January 2010
Responses by Alice J. Ralph**

Pg 1 – “we do look forward to appropriately-scaled edge infill projects over time.” Please provide details on the vision you see for future infill development that will take place near your project on the Library Lot? What locations? What kind of developments?

Some of the envisioned locations and kinds of development are described in later sections of the Ann Arbor Community Commons (A2C2) Proposal, for example on pages 12-13. These include furnishings, buildings and structures that enhance existing businesses in the surrounding area of the Library Lot. The scale of buildings should reflect the existing general and designated historic contexts such as the residential character of Division and William Streets. Four simple principles should guide development on the Library Block:

- The Library Lot should remain as Public Land, similar to any public park or right of way, to minimize public financial risk and to maximize both public access and lasting economic benefit.
- Buildings or a complex on the interior of the Library Block should be no more massive than the proposed Downtown Library replacement building.
- Rear lots should be developed to provide secondary addresses with windows or views and entrances fronting on the central commons area. (Facilitate secondary addresses.)
- Pedestrian movement should predominate over vehicular movement.

Envisioned development related to the A2C2:

A shared dining courtyard controlled by the existing restaurants that overlooks significant features of the Commons. Braun Court is an existing successful example, except for its lack of a focal landscape such as the proposed central commons. Even the popularity of sidewalk dining on the Dean Promenade is diminished by adjacent traffic and pedestrian crowding.

Through-block pedestrian circulation between buildings on Liberty and William Streets. These will be strongly identified character features such as gateways, small tower elements or design focal points. Gates will be incorporated with respect to adjacent uses and overall organization of the pedestrian path system.

An integration and formalization of existing and new urban landscapes. The A2C2 proposal reworks the elevations and transitions among the Commons area, Liberty Plaza, the Michigan Square Building and its rear parking lot. (This requires a swap of underground parking for surface area.) The Commons becomes a foreground to the Library, reinforcing it as a major downtown pedestrian destination. Enhanced sightlines and a landscaped viewshed draw focus toward the Downtown Library. The reorganization of destinations and connections mitigates the drawbacks of the Federal Building's existing Fifth Avenue frontage. Focus on the Library activates the Library Block and proximate sites.

Division Street frontage. The Commons proposal inserts a Commons gatehouse to symbolically repair the historic residential character of the Division Street frontage. The gatehouse ground level will accommodate both vehicular exit and pedestrian access. The Commons gatehouse will dampen traffic noise and connect the residential streetscape with the public commons area, visually defining and physically calming the transition.

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The **“panhandle”** portion of the underground parking structure under this Division Street frontage demands special planning attention. The Commons proposal will seek a stronger relationship to uses above, with bicycle commuting as a notable priority.

The rear lot area of the Credit Union as secondary address and Commons frontage. Using the asset of public underground parking in exchange, the existing parking lot becomes available for private development of offices or residences in scale with the context.

Noble/Luick “carriage house” building. This building will be considered for rehabilitation as Commons office, meeting and display space, upon satisfactory agreement with the owner and any residential tenants. For example, tenants may have the opportunity to relocate to new units created on the Credit Union rear lot.

Development of additional sites by other public entities. Many have called for coordinated planning of the disparate sites of the Library Lot area. The kind of incremental and negotiated projects described here should be part of a comprehensive plan that includes economic, business and livability initiatives. Public ownership and participation are keys to implementation of creative redevelopment. Civic and non-profit organizations with related objectives will benefit from coordinated plans. The AADL, Washtenaw Community College, Washtenaw Housing Alliance, and Ann Arbor Transportation Authority are examples. City entities with overlapping objectives and jurisdictions include the DDA, the Parks Advisory Commission, Business Improvement Zones, the City Planning Commission and others.

A 1991 area plan existing conditions of the Library Block and surrounding area. Since then, the former Ann Arbor Y has been replaced by a paved and controlled surface parking lot characterized as “temporary”. The entire ‘Old Y’ block is now nearly two-thirds devoted to surface parking and vehicular movement. DDA plans and other studies have categorized surface parking as among the least desirable uses for Downtown land area.

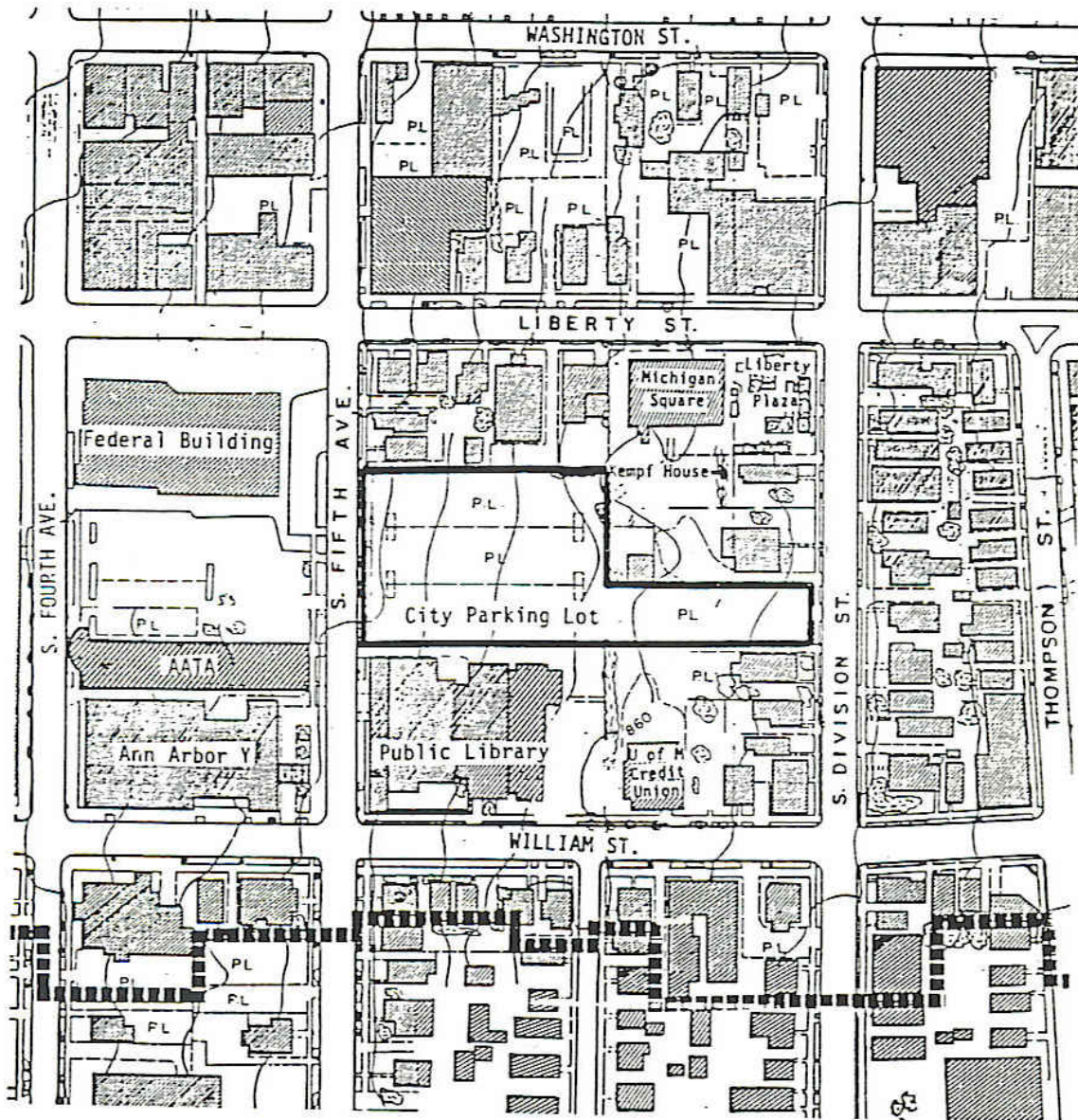
Since the 1991 area plan, a larger multi-family building has replaced the one shown next to the Michigan Square office building on the Library Block as depicted in the current area plan. Ironically, despite efforts for a more pedestrian friendly frontage, the entry to grade level garage parking dominates the Liberty Street frontage of the new building. In combination, the square footage devoted to surface parking on the Library Block is already at a high percentage. What is the current default for the surface area of the new underground parking? It is another surface parking lot, shown in DDA construction plans. If most of the Library Lot area is instead covered by a building, as some propose, the remainder will still be dominated by vehicular movement, not by people.

The evolutionary development of the Commons gives time for economic conditions to change and opens possibilities for development that will knit the Library Block area together in a coordinated and imaginative way. The Commons is a beacon to light that way, a path which the citizens of Ann Arbor forge themselves and officials implement with them. Citizen-driven plans for open space create places where benefits and returns of all kinds begin to multiply.

[A copy of the referenced plan from the 1991 Library Block Study follows immediately.]

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THE LIBRARY BLOCK AND SURROUNDING AREA



Pg 3 – “by its design the public outdoor space at City Hall is too small.” Please provide backup to this statement - why is this space at City Hall too small?

The comparison refers to the entrance area as it has been designed and delineated in current construction drawings. Public gathering space is a high-priority community benefit.

Historical photographs and site maps show that the number of people who were able to gather on the historic County Courthouse lawn could not possibly gather in the densely designed area that will serve as forecourt to the new building entrances being

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completed. The proposed landscape and art installation also pre-empt much of any potential gathering space. Furthermore, the faster the traffic on a street, the larger streetscape elements need to be in order to have satisfactory visual impact from the road or to provide physical and psychological relief to pedestrians. Huron Street is the fastest street in Downtown. For these reasons, the space-provided by the new City Hall design is "too small" for public gatherings and active pedestrian use.

Park researchers have also advised that approximately one acre is the minimum functional size for naturalized urban parks. Functional urban plazas or open spaces are advised to be significantly larger and more humane, i.e. with seating and landscape elements--than the expanded roadway width proposed on the Library Lot site. (A well-known local landscape architect scoffed at the approximately 1000 square feet proposed as a "joke".)

Public buildings deserve public open space in proportion to their importance to the community. A new AATA transit hub, the Federal Building and whatever significant building development replaces the "Old Y" will all be enhanced by well-planned orientation to a central commons on the Library Lot site.

Residents of Ann Arbor have long held the expectation of significant open space for public enjoyment on the Library Lot site. The importance of the Downtown Library to residents demands a proportionally generous open space at its proposed new entrance.

Pg 3 – "problems which the downtown library identifies and aptly addresses now, are also problems that the A2C2 will be designed to ameliorate." What do you mean by this? - what are the problems being addressed by the downtown library and how will A2C2 ameliorate these problems? Can you provide us with a statement from the AADL? board about your proposal's impact on these issues for us to consider as part of the review process?

Today's public libraries acknowledge their *de facto* use by and attractiveness to persons who are not necessarily library patrons, but who also need the services which libraries provide as part of their public mission. Unfortunately, patron care also entails additional attention to persons with life difficulties that are otherwise not sufficiently addressed by more direct social services provided by the community. In conversations with AADL representatives and in discussions of the AADL Board, it is clear that library staff are comparatively successful in balancing the mission of the library with humane response to the needs of all who frequent the library for whatever reasonable purpose.

University of Michigan students in a course taught by real estate developer Peter Allen recently made presentations to the AADL Board of their concepts for development. In the course of discussion Allen made a case for comprehensive planning of the "Midtown" character area. The students were enthusiastic and apparently unaware of jurisdictional covenants and zoning requirements, as well as the complex social aspects of their assigned study area.

Shortly following the students' presentations, a special meeting of the AADL Board was devoted to a wide-ranging discussion of the six proposals responding to the Library Lot RFP 743. In lieu of a statement from the AADL board, the A2C2 proposal refers here to the video of this meeting, even though the Board reached no conclusions other than to recognize their critical interest. We can add that while reviewing the drawings and plans for the recently suspended AADL Downtown Library building replacement in the Director's office, it was clear that neither a featureless open space nor a maximum

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density project would be well-received. The AADL website introduces strategies to “Develop and maintain clean, safe, physical facilities that creatively meet the needs of the community and staff with an emphasis on sustainability, accessibility and flexibility.” The AADL website offers additional information on its “Strategic Planning 2004-2010” pages www.planning.aadl.org which also indicates that it will soon be time for the Library to begin working on its next strategic plan.

The reasons for the unintended role of the library as social services provider are many and constantly debated. However, the existing mix and adjacencies of area buildings and activities could be improved to enhance core services of the Library. The A2C2 will transform the contributing context with new outdoor spaces and views. Orientation to a central commons will also create the sense of a valued place with improved sight lines and organized edges. With sensitive lighting and well-defined pedestrian circulation the central commons will accommodate a full calendar of programs as well as the casual interpersonal interactions that build community.

The Commons proposal seeks compatibility with AADL planning strategies.

Pg 4 – if library lane is reduced to one lane, how patrons will access the parking structure if school buses are using the one lane for drop off? How will other patrons drop off/pick up passengers at the Library if the one lane is blocked?

The A2C2 proposal recommends one travel lane in the direction of west to east. Additional pullout areas will accommodate the desired dropoff function as well as access to underground parking. The recommendation removes vehicular conflicts in the parking project design as well as conflicts between vehicular and pedestrian movement. By allowing travel only from west to east, sufficient stacking space is provided in Library Lane. Library lane is not classified as a public roadway. Vehicle speeds will be comparable to those in parking lots. Slower speeds enhance pedestrian safety.

The Commons also seamlessly integrates the proposed alley on the north edge of the site. The function of the service lane will be maintained. Provision of other service options will reduce the frequency of its use by vehicles. People will be the primary users of the alley area for both casual and programmed Commons activities.

Pg 7 – how will the “third space” offered on this site be more popular than Liberty Plaza park, which is also a “third space”, but even more centrally located than this location?

Liberty Plaza is enjoyed daily by downtown workers. Seasonal weekly concert programming has increased the positive impact of Liberty Plaza. Liberty Plaza by itself is often seen in passing as a decoratively landscaped downtown corner that happens to be handy for a break or lovely to see with holiday lights. A difference of some yards distance from an undefined central point is irrelevant.

The recent influx of Google employees and raised dining terrace space overlooking Liberty Plaza improves the level of visual connection from businesses near the Liberty and Division intersection. Restoring the original connection between the Michigan Square Building and Liberty Plaza is a matter of tenant cultivation. The street improvements on Division will also reframe the approach to Liberty Plaza.

A “third place” [the actual phrase used in the A2C2 proposal] is a destination as well as being part of a path system. By integrating Liberty Plaza with the central commons both physically and programmatically, Liberty Plaza becomes a gateway to the Commons and Library, paired as a “Third Place” that functions in balance with our secondary and primary Places, namely Work and Home.

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Pg 8 – “an elevated element is a highly desirable feature of a successful urban space and provides three-dimensional orientation.” Can you please provide examples where an elevated urban space in Ann Arbor has proven to be successful?

Consider any existing roof terrace, green roof or balcony in Downtown. These elevated elements increase the value of real estate.

The proposed and deferred design for the Downtown Library replacement building includes a roof garden on the south and a terrace room above the north entrance façade and overlooking the Library Lot. The Commons provides the kind of view that will complement this publicly accessible elevated element.

The widely accepted desirability of an elevated *element* in an urban landscape comes from both anthropological and design studies. (These are features, not the spaces themselves.) The timeless work of Christopher Alexander identifies the elevated element as desirable in many forms. Most people enjoy a change of viewpoint whether from a porch, from the sixth floor of City Hall, the top of a jungle gym, a parking structure stair tower, the upper reaches of UM Stadium or the knolls of a golf course.

The pedestrian bridges over the Huron River are enjoyed in use and in photographs. The hose tower of the Hands On Museum is a multi-functional interior space as well as an urban feature framed by the new construction of the Police and Courts building on Huron Street. Although not generally accessible to the public, the University of Michigan has two carillon towers to punctuate both the main and north campuses. The Kerrytown shops opens its chime tower for public playing three times a week.

Including an elevated element in the Commons will also mean taking advantage of the existing twelve-foot change in elevation across the site. Twelve feet is enough elevation to arrange a small amphitheater. The site is large enough that universal design will seamlessly compensate for mobility challenges due to the grade change with little need for handrails or clumsy ramp systems.

Pg 8 – do you believe you will achieve consensus on what to place on the site? Why?

The Commons proposal is based on a level of consensus already achieved. The Commons recognizes both diversity of opinion and changing conditions. A vibrant community like Ann Arbor has both the need and the capacity to realize a commonly held idea. We demonstrate this by voting, for example, to support our enviable parks system. We develop targeted partnerships to repair the emerald ash borer’s damage to our urban tree canopy. We volunteer on commissions and committees to create a more beautiful downtown, to honor our heritage, to protect our watersheds and end homelessness. If we were not capable of consensus as a community to manage our assets while we address community needs, we would not be recognized nationally, as we are, among the best communities to live.

We can repeat here the fact that the 2009 Nobel Prize for Economics was awarded to American Elinor Ostrom whose work affirms the frequent superiority of user-managers for assets held in common. It is often the users who know better than a bureaucracy how to manage what is important to us.

Pg 14 – Who do you anticipate will lead the effort to design and construct the commons?

The co-signers to the Commons proposal are Alice Ralph and Alan Haber. Each has different background and experience. With community input the Commons proposal provides a matrix of ideas and organizational structures. Ann Arbor is rich in expertise.

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With the cooperation of the City, the Commons co-signers will convene a panel of community leaders willing and able to volunteer their own expertise and to assemble additional advisors and gather citizen response. As decisions are finalized, the panel will call for informational and support liaison with appropriate City units and other organizations. The Commons will likely resemble a “special facility”, as the Parks Recreation and Open Space Plan terms assets such as Cobblestone Farm, Leslie Science Center and the Farmers Market. As owner, the City performs its own regulatory reviews. The Commons panel will evolve into an independent advisory committee, foundation or conservancy as paid professionals are commissioned to complete related projects.

Pg 15 – “The A2C2 may be more aptly described as ‘outfill’ (rather than infill), keeping the Library Lot commercial district viable.” What are you defining as the Library Lot commercial district?

The reference is to existing businesses on the streets that bound the Library Block , especially those in the historic Liberty Street district. Due to the nature of the through-block sites of the Federal Building Block, business on Fourth Avenue may also be perceived part of an affinity group. These are mainly local businesses which depend on their downtown commercial and residential neighborhoods for viability.

Pg 18 – How do you intend to finance any construction on the commons site?

For comparison, a copy of the “Project Budget” is attached from the 1991 study “The Library Block.” Because some of the same conditions still exist, economic and scope adjustments approximate a budget for the Commons. *The absence of significant public subsidy for private development costs is remarkable.* The Commons assumes that costs for public uses and facilities will be born by the public. Private development construction that advances public objectives on private property will be facilitated by the public.

The final design and conditions at commencement of Commons construction will determine what combination of external grants, donations or public funds will contribute to an initial phase. Public funds will be either appropriated or financed using available instruments. The City has its own financing procedures. However, the City administration and DDA routinely formulate funding for consultant expenses and capital projects. The public has voted to levy millages dedicated toward parks, greenbelts, infrastructure, transportation, etc. As with other capital projects, the City will identify appropriate public funding sources or contributions within available limits.

The DDA is a logical party to preliminary construction of whatever goes on the surface above the underground parking structure, whether that will be a surface parking lot or some form of park. The cost of constructing a surface parking lot is one amount which the DDA can shift toward the construction phase of the Commons.

Pg 18 – you recommend sources of dollars for construction. Where will the funds be found to maintain and manage this space (e.g. mowing, snow removal, administration, etc.) given that the City announced a need to cut 30% of its budget?

The City issued Library Lot RFP 743 with full knowledge of the City budget constraints. The RFP implied, but did not explicitly describe development intent. The RFP does not directly address the financial burden of risk inherent in publicly-subsidized private development.

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The Commons proposal recognizes the advantage of evolutionary development. This approach will project and adjust expenditures over time in order to reduce risk. The DDA is a logical party to long-term management given the both integration of the parking facility with the Commons and the DDA charter mission.

Because public participation in its creation will generate an extraordinary sense of public ownership, the Commons will engender sustained support. The Commons will accommodate a full calendar of programmed activities both privately and publicly sponsored. As with some City facilities, fees and contributed services will cover part of ongoing maintenance costs.

Pg 18 – one of the objectives for the development of this site is a financial return to the city. While you mention a variety of financial prospects in your alternative section 13, you don't indicate any specific examples. Would you please discuss specific financial returns that would benefit the city from your proposal?

The use of different but related terms in the RFP suggests open or overlapping definition of financial and economic return. The satisfaction of community benefit also begs for thoughtful exploration as related to monetized return to the City treasury. What prices do we put on pride of place? community spirit? cultural enrichment? environmental compensations? economic health and opportunity?

The Commons proposal speaks to the broadest array of enduring community benefits or returns possible. A letter of invitation was included in our proposal. Businesses and organizations were invited to decide ways in which they might participate in creating or supporting the Commons. Their participation in programming, for example, will serve them as business development or promotion of organizations.

Successive developments are expected to bring economic stimulus and financial return to the DDA and City. The overall stimulative effect of open or green urban spaces such as greenways, plazas or parks has been shown by myriad studies and reports. The Commons proposal differs from the typical building development *pro forma*. The Library Lot site remains in public ownership. Development of the Commons will stimulate private investment in the surrounding area.

Development of nearby sites such as the Library and the Old Y site will start to connect with other urban features such as the planned Allen Creek Greenway. A low-carbon Commons greatly reduces the negative impact of new development on and near the site. The Commons affords opportunities to integrate tangible environmental remediation and demonstration projects such as for water management, energy efficiency and the use of natural, restorative and renewable materials as adaptations to climate change. A relatively small investment in the Commons development on the Library Lot leads the way to necessary recalculation of the impacts of building development.

How do you envision your development relates to Liberty Plaza park? Your project would create two parks on one block – would one park attract a different user than the other – and if so, how would these users be different?

(This question seems to have been repeated.)

The Commons project actually creates one park from two sites—renovation of the existing Liberty Plaza and evolution of the Commons will create gateway, path and place that benefit the surroundings. Intense programming will bring diverse and numerous users to activate the surroundings.

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Other than the Library, all other buildings on this block have their back to the site. How do you envision loitering and vandalism being averted so they don't become problems for the Library?

Small scale development on rear lot areas will create secondary addresses that will change backs to frontages that offer incidental surveillance. Security provided for the parking structure, transit hub, Federal Building and development on the Old Y site will combine to heighten safety and security for residents and businesses as well as the Library.

The Commons strengthens the positive aspects of neighborhood and community. As suggested in other responses to these questions, the development proposed in association with the Commons will increase visual and pedestrian connections that reduce or eliminate the opportunity for unwanted activities. As citizens plan the Commons creating solutions to problems, they also address broader Downtown issues.

You suggest that savings from the construction of the parking structure could be directed to this project –from what portions of the parking project will these savings be found?

The current underground parking structure project includes construction of a surface parking lot. At minimum, the cost of the parking lot can be shifted to construction of the initial phase of the Commons. Reduction in roadway paving area will result in cost savings that will be dedicated to elements of the Commons. The Commons proposal projects some savings—up to an estimated \$4 million—from designed reduction of building foundation capacity, if an official commitment is made to development that is less than two thirds of the maximum zoning allowance. This reduction is based on context-compatible design for construction no denser than the Library or its replacement building. The possible increase in revenue from additional underground parking spaces in recovered square footage is speculative, but adds to potential savings.

Citizens have consistently voted to tax themselves in order to fund schools, libraries, land preservation and parks. Excess in building foundation capacity can support monumental elements of the Commons. Such official subsidy of private construction should be applied instead to the capital improvement of public land for the benefit of the citizens who own it.

Your financing plan indicates several other possibilities sources of construction funds – including parking swaps, parks millage funds, Convention & Visitors Bureau, Dean Fund, and more. Did you secure commitments from any of these sources?

While the City can requisition or reassign funds from a variety of internal sources, requests from the public are required to engage with commissions, boards, and committees according to defined procedures. Since the elements of the design are not finalized, it is not advisable to secure commitments in advance of having specific cost estimates. This would not be good public process. The elements of the Commons will be well within the aggregate of projects to which these organizations ordinarily contribute. The Library Lot RFP called for creative approaches to accomplishing a project that benefits our community. The Commons proposal includes parking swaps and implied zoning variances because this site deserves such creativity.

The timetable for the 1991 Library Block report shows that building development and project commitments are interdependent. They are also affected by the design and construction schedule of the underground parking, not so much the reverse. Note the interrelationships in the following study excerpt:

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TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Project implementation can be accomplished in four major stages. The first, which incorporates design, development, property-owner agreement negotiations, municipal reviews, and completion of cost estimates contains the activities necessary to obtain project financing. This phase would take six to nine months to accomplish.

The second stage is the pre-construction project financing stage. Final approvals for DDA funding and private financing cannot be negotiated until the agreements and required municipal actions performed in phase one are complete. The period required for completing the negotiations and commitments required for project financing is a minimum of six months.

Construction for the parking garage, park, public improvements, and first phase of housing in addition to the Credit Union expansion and other property-owner improvements would take approximately two and one-half years after completion of agreements for financing.

The final stage is occupancy and use of the parking structure and first phase of housing. This is when the project begins producing revenue for the City.

Of particular interest is the sentence, *"The period required for completing the negotiations and commitments required for project financing is a minimum of six months."* While such negotiations surely took place for the underground parking, none should be expected to have taken place regarding the Library Lot RFP site.

Where will maintenance/operations funds be found to run this facility once constructed?

(This question seems to have been repeated.)

Many communities value public open places so highly that citizens are inspired to form foundations, governance committees or other private organizations for the stewardship and financial support of them. Internal official public mechanisms sometimes fall short due to the nature of bureaucracy. Again, the capacity of citizens has been notably demonstrated to be superior to that of bureaucracy with regard to managing assets of community value. This is no condemnation of City staff or of the motivations of public officials.

A few examples of privately operated or maintained publicly-owned Downtown parks include Chicago's Millennium Park, Oklahoma City National Memorial, Detroit's Campus Martius, and Citygarden of St. Louis. Kalamazoo and Northville are among smaller Michigan communities that are making their own Downtown Public Places.

The successful evolution of the Commons demands official public investment and investment in the citizens. That is, we must have confidence in our capacity as a community to succeed in any worthwhile project. Even when we are tempted to sell ourselves short, or are threatened by short selling, we should look forward with confidence to the kind of place we want Ann Arbor to be. We will not shrink from duties that yield the progress we seek.

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Attachment from the 1991 Library Block (Luckenbach, Coopers, Walker, etc.)

PROJECT BUDGET

Because the project plan is in a schematic form, only a generalized project budget can be shown at this time. The table below describes estimated development costs.

ACTIVITY	COST	FUNDING SOURCES
Parking Garage, Park and Hardscape Improvements	\$10,000,000	Ann Arbor Building Authority Bonds, Elizabeth Dean Fund (Park only), DDA Pedestrian Improvement Fund (Pedestrian Linkages)
120 Residential Units	\$18,000,000	Private Financing, First Martin Corp.
Credit Union Expansion	\$1,500,000 to \$5,000,000	Private Financing, Credit Union
Public Library	\$50,000	Board of Education
Residential and Business Property Improvements	\$50,000 to \$100,000	Private Financing, Property Owners

Total preliminary project development costs are estimated at \$30 to \$34 million with approximately \$10 million financed through the City. This assumes a 500 space parking garage with a development cost of approximately \$16,000 per space, plus \$1 million for the park and hardscape improvements and \$1 million in soft costs and contingency.

If the residential project and Credit Union expansion were developed at a total minimum value of \$19.5 million, it is estimated the projects would generate an \$618,052 annually in additional property taxes for the DDA. If it is assumed the 500 space parking structure has 250 permit spaces and 250 open or transient spaces and the revenue generated is similar to Ann Arbor's existing East Washington structure, approximately \$403,750 at current rates should be generated annually.

To: The Ann Arbor Library Lot Advisory Committee, and others interested.
From: Alan Haber on behalf of the proposal for an Ann Arbor Community Commons

Response to Questions: The full questions are on the city web site.

Introduction: The "commons" is a philosophical, value laden idea affirming natural and customary rights, from before private property and related to the survival of community, providing resources for people's needs. The word is often appropriated to designate a shopping mall or condo development or university student center. We are using a deeper meaning.

Essential to the commons is shared responsibility as well as free access to all members of the community. The commons is less the "public" in contrast to the "private," administered by the state or government. It is more the "community" in contrast to the "individual" "Commoning" is the way people relate to the commons, it expresses human solidarity and the virtues of sharing, mutual respect and interdependence. Our vision of the commons is a process which represents the needs and contributions of all the people of the Ann Arbor area community. The idea of shared responsibility implies shared leadership. The call for the commons comes from many sources. There is more than one voice expressing the commons. The response to the questions that follows expresses one of the voices. It sees the commons as an endeavor of civic education and development, as well as the creation of a civic facility.

1.[p1] Regarding "in-fill" around the commons. The "committee for the commons" will invite each of the adjoining properties to find ways to relate the commons on the adjoining unimproved or underused land. What they might chose to do, or nothing, must await the invitation requesting their participation and time for consideration. For instance:

*** the Credit Union might finance a several story residential building above their ground level parking.

*** the Coop Center might develop its back yard as a cooperatively run cafe and fair trade store featuring products from around the world

*** the apartment/carriage house (old hospital) might allow a new healing center outreach clinic to use some of its space, and additional housing or office

*** the Kemph House might include an Ann Arbor history trail into and from the commons

*** the Liberty Street properties, like Seva would be enticed to open a seating area to the South, facing the commons. and the First Martin Building would be approached to reconfigure its surface parking and opening to the South

*** the Fifth Avenue properties of Earthen Jar and Jerusalem Gardens would naturally orient food service and seating toward the commons and the historic house would have the commons as front yard.

One form of in-fill might be "over-fill." to build a one floor or two story, (that is, a second and third level,) above the ground level Library Lane, and parking structure entrance, from Division Street, as a home and meeting place for non-profit organizations. Several Ann Arbor peace and justice organizations are interested in a combined space in an "Ann Arbor Peace Center," such as exists in many cities, such as Burlington, Vermont and St. Louis, Missouri.

The intent of the commons proposal is to press back against the dominance of the automobile. It would eliminate the through alley and have only an in-out drive way, as it is now, for refuge pick-up and utility service.

2.[p3] Why is the City Hall landscaped space too small? There was, and is, no intent in the City Hall, of which we have heard, to provide a space for public assembly. The indoor public auditorium space was cut out of the plans, for financial reasons. Planning was made for maximum functional (official) use of the available space. What is left over isn't large enough to allow a large assembly. If the President came to town to talk, or Mohammed Ali, or a public debate, the listeners and on-lookers would spill out into the street or require barricade to keep people safe from traffic.

3. [p3] The concerns of the library as we have heard them, are that the area would be a dead space and frightening to be near, or it would attract "people with problems." We intend regular programming in the commons, varied activity and direct approaches to people with problems. The library has not expressed itself on the various proposals. While we do not begin with a fixed plan, and the process will determine the particulars, it is reasonable to expect a drinking fountain and toilet facility in the commons and parking structure, which would reduce the use of the library as a "public facility" of that sort.

One idea is that once the underground construction fence is down, and we can begin above, the first (temporary) structure could be begun, representing a traditional Native American "Long House," with elders of the Potawatome being asked to designate a local guardian group for the commons, respectful of the ancient spirits of the land, locating itself in the long house, exemplifying good stewardship, being eyes on the commons and helpful to those in need. The long house or "commons house" would serve as a meeting place for commons development and problem solving.

4. [p4] Library Lane would be reduced to one through lane with a set-back to allow school buses, and cars to pull in, from Fifth Avenue, West to East and drop off, and return to the through traffic lane to continue to Division Street, or into the underground parking. there should be no blockage, and also no parking

5. [p7] The commons would have an improved walkway connection with Liberty Plaza. Liberty Plaza does have occasional programs of music and free food, but the people space is fully paved and is broken by planters not allowing clear sight lines or inviting large gatherings. Its sunken, shaded design contributes to the stereotype as a place for sunken

people. The commons is intended as more open, sunny (when there is sun,) green and varied in its programming. It is adjacent to the Library and more open toward downtown, the transit center and whatever develops on the old Y lot. The Southwest-Northeast pedestrian way should also bring more foot traffic through Liberty Plaza increasing its diversity. The total block planning and participation perspective should also stimulate ideas for improvement of Liberty Plaza as well. Liberty Plaza might be considered more a "pocket park," and the commons more a "central park." Arrangements with surrounding property owners would amplify their connection.

6. [p8] There are no elevated urban spaces, walkways and terraces in Ann Arbor such as might develop on the commons. Our proposal does not begin with a building plan. If there are to be buildings on the commons, they will be the product of the process. Advantage would be taken of the grade difference between Division Street and Fifth Avenue. We hope for a 4 season place of public gathering, with a likely roof garden and raised walk from Liberty Plaza to the commons.

7 [p8] Can we find consensus? Consensus yes, unanimity probably not. Consensus takes time. Our first call to the City was to "slow down." Public participation takes time: time for all parts of the public to hear, and come to believe that they are actually invited, time for ideas to come forward, time for different arrangements to be imagined and sketched, time for discussion, design sharets, push and pull and everyone heard and included in the process.

Once the City Council decides that the commons is the way to go, we have roughly 2 years to work out a staging of what happens at "ground level" and above, and for the neighbors to recognize and consider the possibilities the commons offers for their improvements. The first and simplest stage can be grass, gardens and pathways. Siting and design of structures will be part of the process and building will follow.

The process we envision will center around partnership or interest clusters, allowing people of similar interests to cooperate is seeing how the commons can best realize and exemplify their desires. The functional areas we have envisioned at the beginning include:

public art and visual spaces

music, theater, performance and speakers spaces

garden, perma-culture, landscaped and growing spaces

food

children

fun and games, chess, skating and lawn bowling

festivals, fairs and flea markets

clean energy, solar, wind and geo thermal, and golden LEED objective in structures

air purification and zero carbon objective (relating to exhaust from the underground parking, and global climate crisis)

water purification and storm water management

Ann Arbor history, geology and watershed awareness
100% recycling, clean up and trash management
neighborhood connections
governance of the commons, including safety and "code of conduct"

In areas where there are technical challenges, we would have design competitions to find best practices and best solutions, especially relating to solar, geo-thermal and wind energy. air and water.

Each group would put their ideas on the table and see how their ideas all related to each other. Hopefully an open process will engender good will, mutual appreciation and an eagerness for the best of all ideas to accommodate each other. Should consensus fail, then we can have a vote, among the participants in the process, or city-wide as a question or questions on regular election ballots.

There would be a physical space on the commons for ideas, proposals, sketches to be displayed and accessible, as well as a web site. A monthly public meeting would move the process along. Consultation would be sought from the University of Michigan School of Social Work Community Organization and Landscape Architecture Programs, the Urban Land Institute and others knowledgeable in such matters to help this process be an exemplary model of local democracy and beautiful results.

8 [p14] Who will lead? Once the City Council says "yes," a "committee for the commons" will be initiated, inviting all interested Ann Arbor residents to participate, as in 7. above. Interested architects, designers, builders, would include themselves and be invited from the beginning. When it became time to implement, on the ground, the ideas agreed in the process, a "consortium for the commons" of local builders and skilled trades people, would be constituted, and bonded, to do the work. While there would be liaison with all relevant city agencies, parks, DDA, energy, etc, city staff will have minimum direct responsibility or work load increase.

9. [p15] The "library lot commercial district" refers to all the properties around the commons where commercial activity goes on and that can be enhanced. The attractiveness of the commons would bring people to the area and be an incentive to all proprietors in the vicinity, and potential owners, to see commercial opportunities.

Our "maximum feasible participation" approach emphasizes an area wide planning perspective, including construction on the "Y site" and green-way connections West on William Street, and a "city center" balance point reflecting the University Diag center, so we can also see the commercial zone as reflecting the "town-gown" relation and going all the way to the University, and bringing the University downtown. It would be a place of attraction and pedestrian resting place.

10. [18] Financing construction on the commons. The proposers of the commons are of several minds on this question, and should the City Council or Advisory Committee consider the community commons, we could discuss in practical detail various approaches.

a) The question could be put to the voters, as a special ballot question and millage. "Does Ann Arbor want a commons and are we willing to pay for it?" Ask the voters first, and let the people decide.

b) There is sufficient money in the existing budget of the underground parking to finance whatever would be built and landscaped on the commons, at least for a first phase development. Major savings would be realized from reducing the enhanced foundations of the underground parking structure from the need to support maximum allowable construction of 15 stories, to normal foundations, which would be sufficient to support the commons, even if, at a latter stage in development, a several story building were to be put on some or another part of it. We asked the question of "how much?" but were not given answer. We can estimate about 4 million of the 57 million total could be saved and redirected to above ground commons construction and development.

Further the budgeting in the bond for above ground parking and paving could be redirected to above ground landscaping. We didn't ask that dollar number; it would be equivalent or more than spent on paving the Y lot including storm water provision, possibly another million dollars. Further the DDA has already allocated significant funds to landscaping, furniture, bicycle racks and other ground amenities. which would be available for the commons development. All this money, maybe \$5 million plus, is already in hand, financed from the bond, and secured by the parking underneath.

c) This project could be off the city books all together. The commons would be a self-governed, self-sufficient and self-financed non-profit, philanthropic, charitable, educational public institution and activity, appealing to the gift economy to give what is needed in terms of money and labor. There is a great deal of money and labor of all skills in Ann Arbor.

In practical terms, should the community building concept of the commons be embraced by the Advisory Committee, and the Council, (overcoming initial reservations, and skepticism,) we would hope to make common cause with the "Ann Arbor Town Square" proposal, which makes a generous offer to the City, and many elements of which we like and have reflected our own personal thinkings, through not the grass roots, user driven process of the commons.

As Andrew Carnegie described, the commons would be "a real and permanent good," contribution to our town, about which we often hear on our public radio. There are many in Ann Arbor who would like their name known as a patron of the commons. Like those who support the Michigan Theater Foundation, and most every church and synagogue,

people like the opportunity to give, and feel honored in the recognition of their ability to give, and help something for the good of their community. The commons could be, and is intended and envisioned to be, a unifier and community builder. It could be a sub-account in the Ann Arbor Community Foundation, or be set up as its own fiscal entity. And beside the "big bucks," from the Ann Arbor "donor class," the recent "Obama campaign" showed how the dimes and dollars come forward when people think they are being cared about and hope is stirred. That is the case irrespective of politics.

d) Some combination of the above. The commons is a public good and should properly be part of the city budget, receiving attention along with all other calls for public expenditure. When savings are possible in one budget area, they can be reallocated to developments in the commons. Private volunteers and citizens' clubs can help in some aspects like gardening. Special buildings or facilities like a theater or peace center, long house or skating rink can be financed by individual subscriptions and built when the money is raised. The commons is forever, it does not have to be built all at once.

11. [p18.] maintenance and management of the space: mowing, snow removal and administration. Again, we are of several minds. The same funds that would have maintained the area as a ground level parking lot, were nothing built, are already in the budget, and convertible, such as snow removal on pathways, trash collection, and even security, such as is required for the underground parking and its entrances and exits. Within the framework of city services, the commons would be a park, and included in the park budget, with ultimate park commission oversight. In terms of actually getting the work done, the commons belongs to the people and we could have an "adopt-the-commons for a week" program, like the "adopt-a-highway mile" program, and every voluntary, fraternal, sororal, social, sports, youth, do-good and neighborhood organization would be asked to sign up and show up, and have the commons up-keep be a matter of civic pride. Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, school classes and garden clubs, and businesses and social groups would all have their chances to make the commons shine.

In asking neighborhood groups to "adopt the commons" for a period, we would also be asking programs they would like to bring to the commons, how to show their neighborhood, or bring something special to the whole community.

The ideal of the commons is that every community and identity in Ann Arbor should have its recognition in the commons and every neighborhood be able to see itself. That includes cleaning up as well as showing off.

Actual administration and programming would be in the hands of a "committee for the commons" and how it is formally constituted we would figure out as we go along.

We would invite Diane Ostrom, this year's Nobel Prize winner in Economics for her world work on "the governance of the commons" to come here, in conjunction with the

University of Michigan, and help us in the discussion of how to do it. We would invite other scholars, local and from afar, and field workers experienced in the maintenance of the commons elsewhere in the world. These discussions would be educational for the whole community and extending the invitation to the whole Huron Valley Watershed, both inviting people to the commons as it takes form and truly becomes a "commons", and helping people understand what the concept and history of the commons is about.

12. [p18] Actual return to the City. Our objective is to be "revenue neutral," which we understand is included in the legitimate possibilities, described by the City Council.

Many studies which have been referred to the Advisory Committee indicate the broad benefits to downtown areas from commons like spaces. and if the City can then capture revenue from that increased activity, count it as a direct benefit.

Our view is that the commons is a non-commercial area. It is free (affordable) to use, everyone is asked to contribute. A collection box will be there, (possibly like an artistically designed parking meter with a big donation slot (still to be designed) but where no one is "expired" or ticketed for not paying.) A true accounting of the real costs of the commons would be made, and posted at the commons, so all users can know what are the real costs, and revenues, and non-monetary contributions, and users can become more economically literate, at least on this one piece of land.

Fairs that use the commons might be charged a nominal fee to use a significant part of the space, or vendors asked to contribute a share of any revenue. Such fairs might be a Native American Pow Wow, a German Fair, an Irish Fair, a French Fair, a African-American fair, a Latin fair, an Asian fair, a Renaissance fair and exhibitions of "Creative Anachronism," "Robotics," "High tech, self-providing new work technologies," etc. There might be a flea market a few times a year, a book sellers fair, woodcarvers fair, weavers fair, potters fair, painters fair, etc. highlighting Ann Arbor area creativity. Ann Arbor's several "Sister Cities" could have exhibition weeks in the commons, so we learn more about these places, and encourage visitation and trade.

The Art Fair would certainly want to expand into the commons, likewise the "Summer Festival" and it would be a desirable venue for "summer stock" theater, Shakespeare theater, the "San Francisco Mine Troop," "Bread and Puppet" and "Living Theater" and local groups.

Street fairs that now incur costs to the City for special street closures could also shift to the commons, like the "Green Fair," "Ann Arbor Eats," and the old cars show. The commons would save the city money and the public inconvenience of such closures.

The geothermal capacity from the deep excavation of the underground parking could be developed and provide basis for a small public utility capable of providing heat to surrounding buildings and yield net positive revenue.

On an annual or periodic basis the surplus of contributions and revenues to the commons, over costs and expenses, could be transferred to the city general fund, or park and recreation budget.

Overall, however, the commons is a place of community nurturance. Like the mother, its work is unpaid; and like the mother, it is not for sale. And like the mother its value is priceless, and too often missed.

13. [no page] Liberty Plaza concern, partially addressed in #5, above. We hope the concern for creating the commons will also increase concern for homeless services. To the extent the "homeless community" has found home in the shaded quiet of Liberty Plaza, we would imagine that would remain, and the more actively programmed commons would attract people more interested in engagement, or sitting and reading, lunching or passing through.

14. [no page] Backward orientation of buildings is addressed above, expecting in time the orientations would shift to facing the commons, and activity in the commons would discourage loitering and vandalism. The "attitude of the commons" valuing every person, would also discourage loitering, and encourage engagement, and encourage people to respect where they are welcome.

In addition, we see "people with problems" as part of Ann Arbor and occasions for helping. We approached the University of Michigan School of Social Work to see the commons as an open area field placement to have students in training available as helpers, guides to community services, employment opportunities, etc. This innovative approach has so far been well received at the school, and far better than seeing "such people" as ones to exclude and isolate. We view the commons as being a healing place, healing fractured and divided community, and healing also for traumatized and isolated people, whom "we" too often write off. One of the in-fill opportunities in adjacent spaces, might be for a healing center, directing people to good health resources and integrative medicine modalities. The Ann Arbor community is home to an abundance of health and healing practitioners (consult any issue of the Crazy Wisdom news.) Identifying the commons as a healing place, in these broad terms, will invite a focus for such practitioners on general community service with some likely benefit.

Related to the same question is security and personal safety. In the first call for the commons, the purpose was put forward "to dedicate the commons to the creation of a culture of peace and non-violence for the children of the world." This could be inscribed on the gate posts, along with a code of conduct emphasizing mutual respect. We would call on a partnership of the Michigan Peace Team, the Non-violent Peacekeeping Force, the Ann Arbor mediation services and local university peace and conflict resolution centers to develop a peace keeping approach and practice of restorative justice when there are problems. There would be a "peace place" in the commons where interpersonal

problems can be taken for working out.

The Ann Arbor Community Commons will be an Ann Arbor contribution to this paramount human and world need, for the creation of a culture of peace and non violence. This need was articulated in the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 53/25, declaring attention to this need as a primary task of this first decade of our millennium, if humanity is to survive, if the next generations are not to know the wars we have suffered. From the commons the culture of peace and non-violence can move to the school curricula, and the neutral zone and places where youth congregate, and from the schools back to the commons. This is no small matter, vying in importance with cash return to the city general fund.

15. [no page] Parking structure savings are addressed in 9b above: Reduction of enhanced, reinforced foundations required for maximum permitted height buildings, surface parking provision, and surface amenities. Elimination of the through alley and narrowing Library Lane from 2 way traffic would also represent saving and opportunities to redirect already borrowed money. [Our request for an estimate of the foundation part of such savings was not specifically answered. Until we are given a real construction analysis, our intuitive guess of 4 million dollars can serve as a ball-park indicating the savings in that area alone are not insignificant.]

16. [no page] We have not asked for or secured commitments from any potential source of funds. Once there is a definite "yes," or even a provisional, contingent yes, we would approach all such funds and possibilities, as well as other foundations and possible individual benefactors. The interest in an Ann Arbor Community Commons exemplifying green ways of living, for energy, air, and water systems and the principle and practice of perma-culture nurturing a growing living space, above an underground parking for automobiles, would have wide appeal all over the world among bioneers, futurists, and community developers. Manufacturers of new technologies might well vie with each other for the opportunities to contribute their products for show in the functioning of the commons.

17. [no page] Where does the money come from? We addressed this above, maintenance and operations financed through city existing budget lines, donations and on-going fundraising the gift economy, donations in cash and kind, fees for use, etc.

We could put "little blue commons cans" in every willing downtown store to collect off-site donations.

We could begin a membership constituency, "friends of the commons" to make yearly pledges like public radio and television.

We could initiate a "commons committee" in each neighborhood to host house parties to raise money, and also plan programs.

We could host a benefit concert series over the two years planning development, featuring classical, jazz, blues, folk, country and hip-hop, using each of the established venues in town, such as Hill Auditorium, Michigan Theater, the Ark, etc. raising money for an operations fund.

We could keep our eyes open to apply to the federal government: There must be some relevant programs for which we could find an application. With all the funding experts in Ann Arbor, the "Dean of the Congress" representing the district of the commons, and liberal senators sure to see positively the values enshrined in the commons, we should be able to find some federal return to our town.

We could have a perpetual bake sale, and a stall at the Farmers Market.

(And if, after all that, we are still too impoverished as a community to support 1.2 acres of public land in Ann Arbor, "the Athens of the Mid-West," we could apply for foreign aid from Greece, or possibly China or Israel.)

Conclusion: I hope these responses to your questions, supplementing our proposal, help persuade you of the viability, desirability, creativity, beauty and need of the commons as the vision and the way for transforming the "Library Lot" of public land and its surrounding as a real and permanent good for our community. The Ann Arbor Community Commons proposal seeks an ingathering of the diverse sources of creativity in the Ann Arbor area. Our proposal does not begin with a fixed plan, outsourcing, as it were, the creativity to one or another firm, as is usual with "Requests for Proposals." We begin with the assets of the singular opportunity of this unique lot, and existing public ownership, and the promise of adventure in local democracy to create something together in the best interest of Ann Arbor, above all others on that lot, and beneficial in all respects.

On this Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, 2010, its time to "wake up the dream." Affirm a place in Ann Arbor for the whole community, primarily open, full of green, flexible, for mixed and multi-use, inviting, optimistic for what we can do together.

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