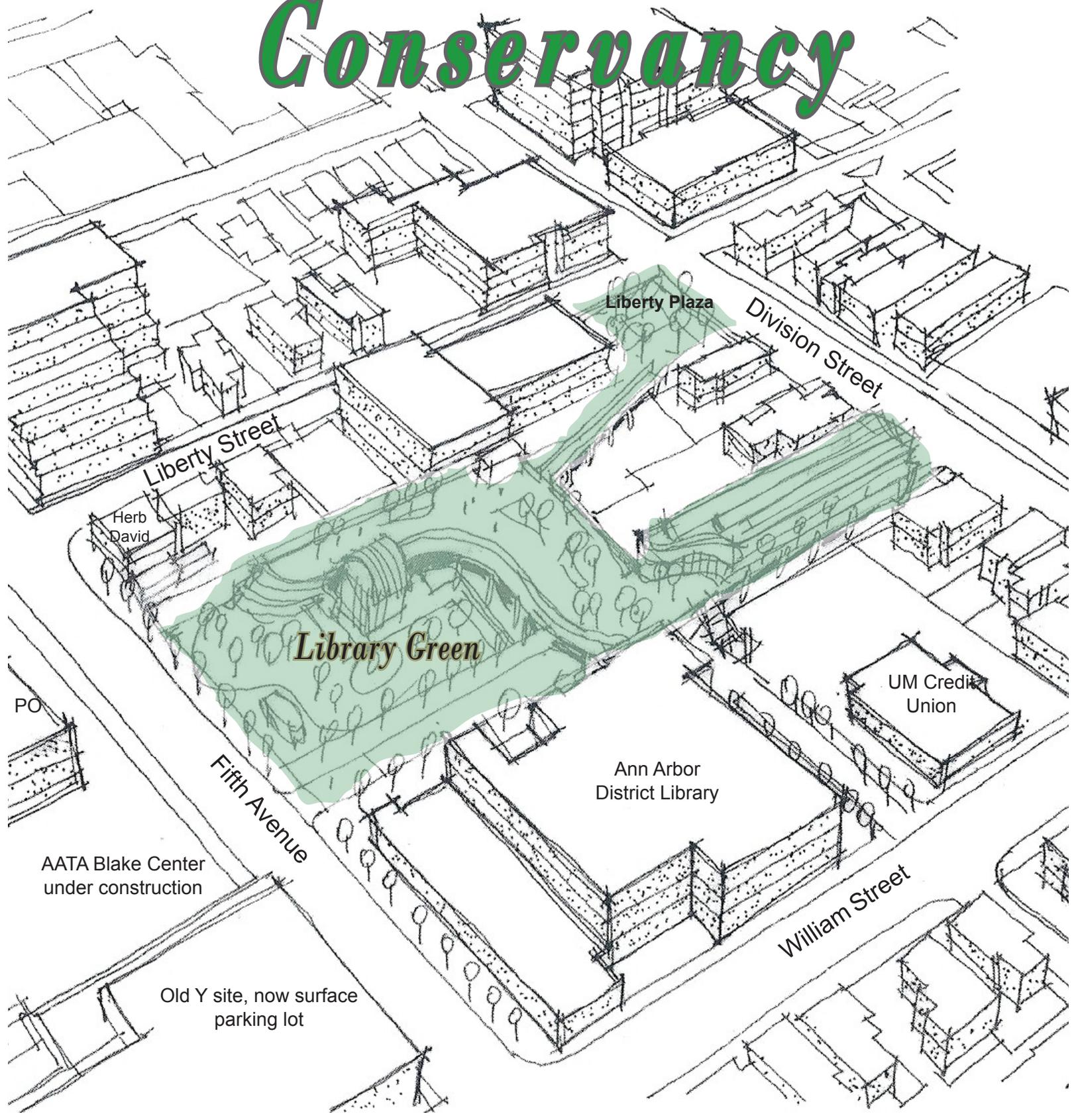


Library Green

A Central Park Now!
Citizens Report
April 2013

Conservancy



Liberty Plaza

Division Street

Liberty Street

Herb David

Library Green

UM Credit Union

Ann Arbor District Library

Fifth Avenue

William Street

AATA Blake Center under construction

Old Y site, now surface parking lot

PO

I. Choose a Park



over the Parking



A Green Roof Park on Top of the Parking Garage Next to our Public Library

The City of Ann Arbor has built a huge 770 space underground parking structure on 5th Avenue next to the Public Library at a cost of over \$55 million dollars. What should go on top? Why not seize this opportunity to create a place for people instead of cars? We can create the central park Ann Arbor currently lacks on a downtown site that the people of Ann Arbor already own. We can have a Library Green.

Citizen's Report on Use of the Top of the Library Lot, April 2013

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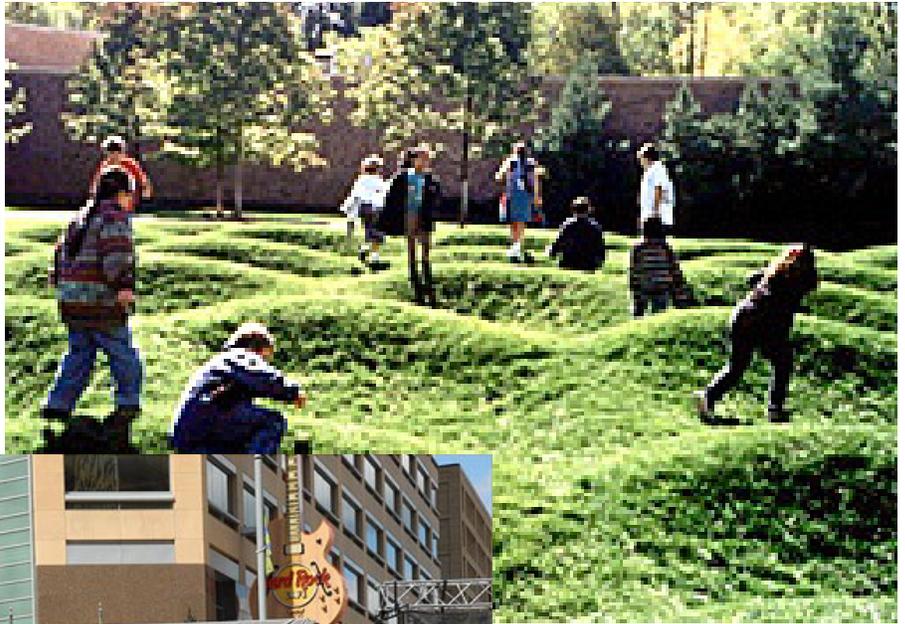
View our web site:
<http://a2centralpark.org>

Library Green Conservancy Mission Statement

We are a group of Ann Arbor residents who believe that the social and cultural value of a community owned public space in downtown Ann Arbor far exceeds any financial value such a space might have. We seek to encourage both public and private agencies and individuals to work together towards creating a green space on the roof the Library Parking structure. Such a space will help to make Ann Arbor even more a special city by providing a common location where people can meet for social, civic, and recreational purposes. We wish to incorporate a broad range of public input in the creation of such a facility and intend that the result will be a significant community asset, ecologically, socially, and financially.



A Successful Urban Park Is Fun



Interactive, playful sculptures like the Wave Field on U-M's North Campus

Campus Martius in Detroit: Outdoor performance in summer sunshine. In the winter, ice skating.

Gallup Park, Ann Arbor



Central Seattle, Washington

II. Ann Arbor's Missing Central Park

The Library Green Conservancy

When the City voted down the hotel/conference center proposal in spring 2011, a group of citizens began meeting with the goal of promoting a park on the Library Lot. We call this vision for a future park "Library Green." We formed a non-profit organization called the Library Green Conservancy. While the construction crew was busy excavating the hole for the new underground parking, we were busy meeting with members of City Council, developers, business and community leaders, adjacent property owners and neighbors to talk about our idea of a central downtown park and to listen to their concerns and suggestions. We learned a lot. We know that there are other—potentially competing—views for the future of the Library Lot, and there are some who have concerns about the possible negative impacts of public, open space—particularly in the downtown.

The Library Green Conservancy would like the City to reconsider and move to create a public place on that portion of the Library Lot now rather than waiting for some future developer. We recognize that it will take creative design to ensure that this plaza is a vibrant public space. We imagine an interactive water feature with kids playing and parents watching—an ice rink in winter. How about interactive public art like the Cube on Regents Plaza? There should be tables and chairs on the Library Lot as there are at sculpture plaza near the Peoples' Food Co-op.

Our vision for a downtown park is informed by the concept of "place-making" through which many urban neighborhoods and downtowns around the world are being transformed. Place-making relies on economic development generated by proximity to an attractive public open space. Once a lively public plaza is created, the existing buildings near the Library Lot could be "reborn," with new, expanded uses. New construction would occur nearby and more customers will be drawn to the area.

According to the City of Ann Arbor's 2009 Downtown Plan, the only downtown park right now is Liberty Plaza—a relatively small public space with limitations due in part to its sunken physical design. By creating a pedestrian link from Liberty Plaza to a Library Green both places would be enhanced. It would be Ann Arbor's downtown Diag. The Ann Arbor District Library draws thousands of people young and old who would enjoy a green space and playground on their way in and out. Like libraries in other cities, the Ann Arbor library could sponsor activities in the park.

Anyone who has used the new underground structure would agree that it is well designed—in some ways

architecturally beautiful. It merits a green crown. Replace surface parking with a beautiful central public square Ann Arbor deserves.

Background

As long as most people can remember, there was a large, surface parking lot next to the library. Over the years, people advocated for it to become a downtown park. When the "pocket park" of Liberty Plaza was created in the late 1970s, many saw the potential for connecting it with the larger, adjacent Library Lot. The dream of a central park for Ann Arbor seemed attainable. Our town could finally reclaim the downtown public square we lost in the 1950s when the stately, old County Courthouse was torn down—its generous lawn replaced with more concrete. The vision of a city plaza on the Library Lot was enshrined in the 2006 Calthorpe Report, the result of a lengthy public process which proposed a "Town Square or central civic area that incorporates an outdoor meeting place, an art center, underground parking, an indoor facility and mixed-use buildings."

The City of Ann Arbor—through the Downtown Development Authority (DDA)—did push forward with creation of the underground parking. However, the vision of a public plaza was subordinated to a competing vision for dense development. The underground parking structure was designed with the assumption that a skyscraper would be built on top. Extra millions were spent on reinforced footings and infrastructure to support the speculative tower.

In 2009 the City issued a "Request for Proposals" (RFP) for development of the Library Lot. A long process followed during which two proposals for public parks were dismissed out of hand. A 15-story, combination hotel/conference center seemed to be the winning proposal. Upon closer examination, it was determined to be unfeasible without a huge financial commitment from the City. City Council said no. After it rejected the "Valiant" hotel/conference center, Council sought another way to build consensus for using the publicly owned land downtown. In spring 2011 Council charged the DDA to oversee a "robust public process" to study and recommend the future of five city owned downtown properties including the Library Lot. The DDA leadership entered into this project – which it named "**Connecting William Street**" – with a preconceived desired outcome – dense development including a downtown hotel. The process it executed unsurprisingly confirmed those preconceived ideas - resisting contrary inputs such as lack of public support for a hotel and the persistent and overwhelming call for downtown public parks.

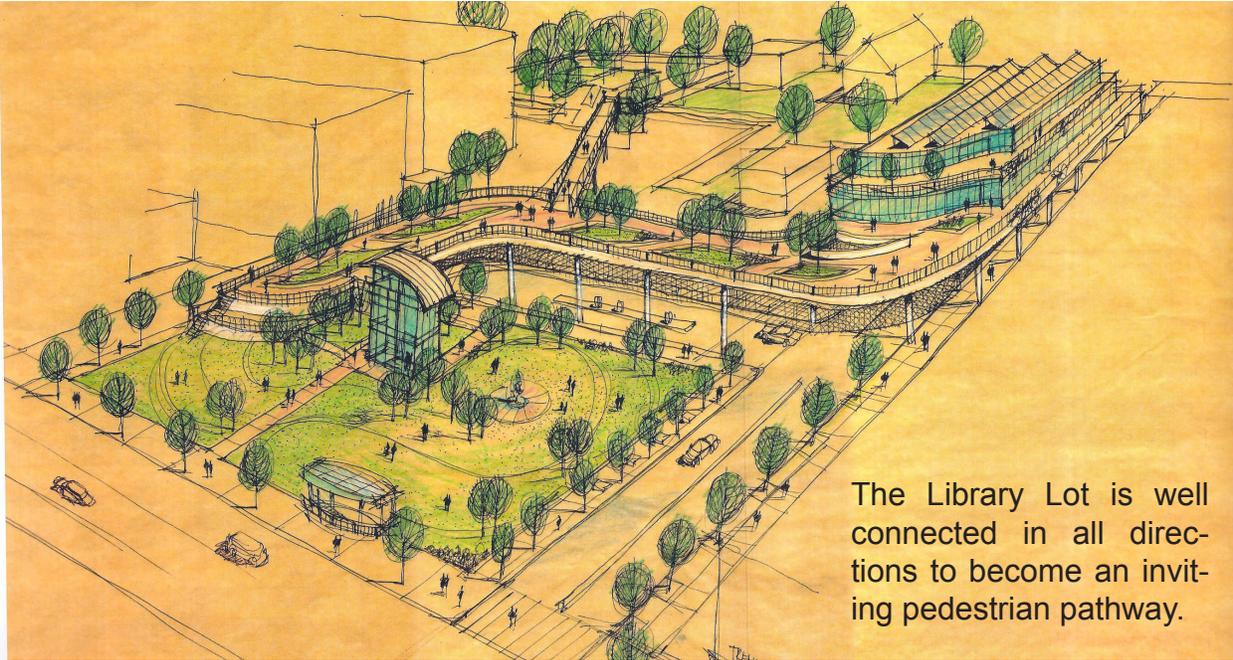
Our vision for a downtown park is informed by the concept of "place-making" through which many urban neighborhoods and downtowns around the world are being transformed.

Question: Why Is the Library Lot Uniquely Appropriate for Our Central Park?

First, of all the available sites, it is the most central! It is in easy walking distance from Main Street, State Street, the central University, and government buildings on Huron.

Second: Pedestrian paths already converge and cross there. For a successful urban park, lots of pedestrian activity is essential. The Library block is guaranteed to have people walking to and from their cars in the underground ramp; also people walking to and from the buses at the AATA terminal.

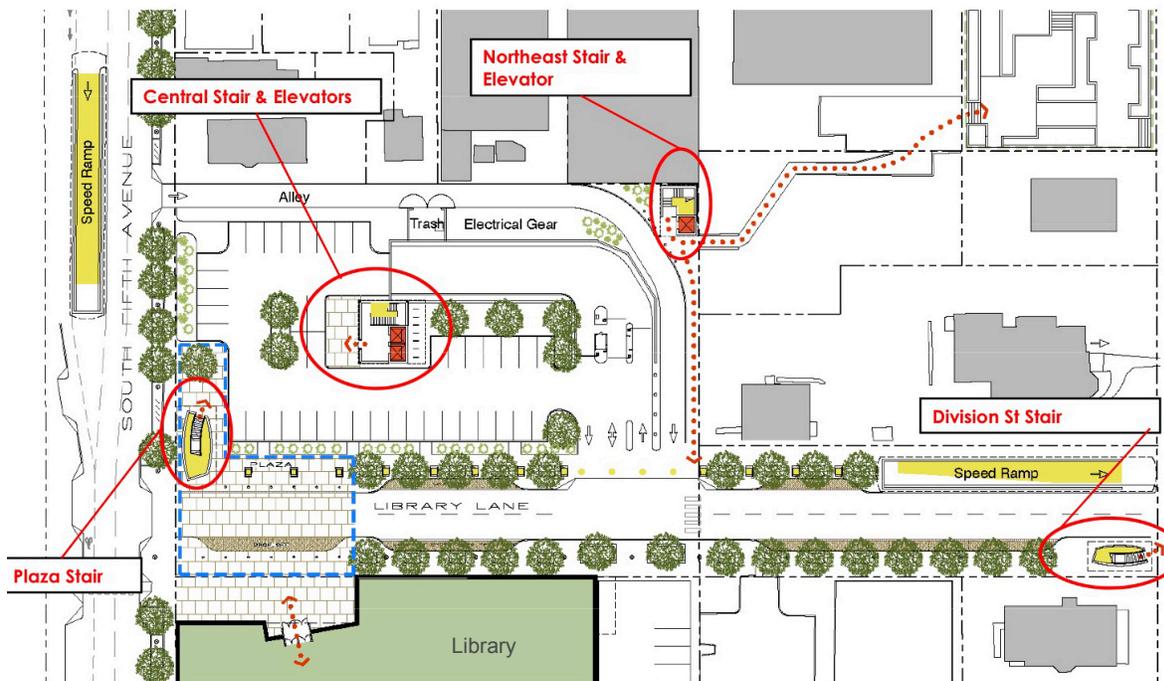
People walk to the library. The block has traditionally had a diagonal path from Liberty Plaza to the library, an east-west path now formalized as Library Lane, and a north-south path from Liberty Street between Seva restaurant and the Denali condos. Some of these paths face new obstacles following construction of the parking ramp, but these pathways can be restored, and new ones can be added.



The Library Lot is well connected in all directions to become an inviting pedestrian pathway.

Above: A Conceptual Plan by Stephan Trendov

Below: the DDA Plan and Current Use



Question: Will Existing Historic Districts Prevent a Good “Frame” from Developing around the Park?

Some people worry that historic buildings on the block do not face the park. Others worry that new construction around the park, taking advantage of the view, would be forbidden under historic district ordinances.

Both of these statements are misconceptions.

First, there is nothing in the law that would prevent existing buildings, whether historic or not, from opening their “backsides” to enjoyment of the new park. New entries, porches, balconies, decks, or plazas would seize this opportunity. Such buildings will have enhanced value.

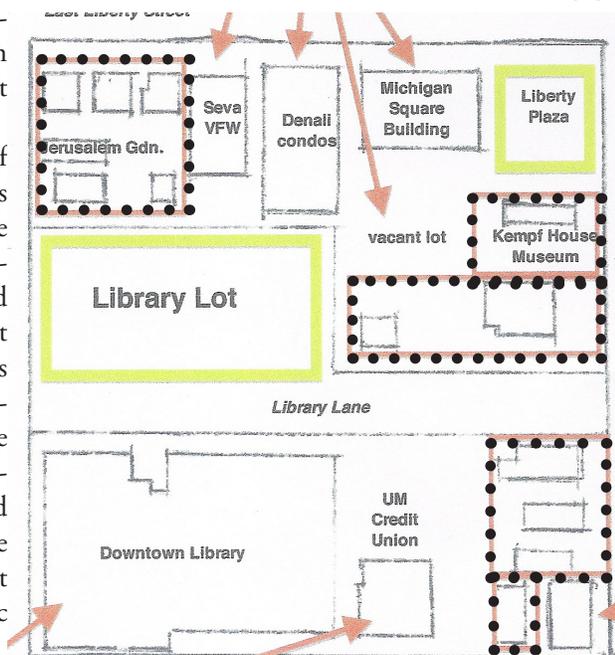
Second, the Historic Districts on the block would not prevent new development from occurring. They protect just five houses on Division (plus a carriage house) and one house facing William. On Liberty Street, three houses west of the Seva Restaurant. Around the corner: Jerusalem Garden, Earthen Jar, and a small house behind Earthen Jar. These houses are in dotted lines on our map. The Historic District Ordinance protects them from demolition but allows changes to their rear, not visible from the street.

The Historic Districts do not include the Library, the Credit Union, or the Spark building. Those can be demolished and replaced. Denali, Seva and the apartment building on the corner of William and Division are included in the districts as “non-contributing” buildings—that is, having no historic or architectural distinction.

According to the ordinance, non-contributing buildings may be demolished and replaced. Obviously, such changes would not happen tomorrow. But in the long term, as property values rise around the park, these sites will evolve.

The so-called “proximity principle” predicts increased value of land near a public park. It would operate in this case to encourage redevelopment of all properties on the block which are not protected.

A look at the map of the Library Block reveals that the area available for re-development exceeds the area protected by the Historic District Ordinance. Our hope is that changes will be welcomed on many of these sites, and that the changes will be coordinated with each other and the park to create a vibrant setting for the new civic open space.



Question: Is Green Possible? Can Trees, Grass, and Flowers Grow on a Concrete Parking Ramp?

This depends on how much soil and plant material can be supported on the site. We have asked the DDA, the Planning Director, and the City’s Chief Development Officer for this information, but have not as yet received an answer. RFP #743 says that the structure will accommodate 18 inches of soil, and we think it could accommodate more than that. Crushed gravel and stone were laid down under the concrete surface. We could peel back the concrete, remove the stone and replace it with soil and plant material. Trees with a shallow, lateral root system could grow. Certainly grass and flowers could grow. If desired, some of the surface could be finished with pavers.

It is possible to provide shade even without growing big trees. Arbors supporting vines are one way. Hanging baskets of flowers from a central post can create a beautiful shady spot.



Two examples of vines on arbors providing shade

Library Block

The historic structures on the Library block are in the dotted lines.

They may be modified as long as the changes are not visible from the street, but may not be demolished. The “non-contributing” buildings indicated by arrows may be replaced.



III. Cultural & Economic Benefits of Urban Parks

Question: Will a Downtown Park Attract Hi-tech?

Here is the voice of a young tech who moved to Ann Arbor from California and misses the green open spaces provided for tech workers there:

“I am a local startup co-founder, the sort of technology professional that places like Ann Arbor are hoping to attract and retain. I walk around the city enough to know that there is no wide, people-filled space that serves as the center of our civic life. A place to pass through, to socialize, or to read and sip coffee while our kids play.

“For tech workers, perhaps more than for others, an open green space is essential. Creative work requires mental regeneration. No one can just stare at the screen all day. That’s why University campuses provide trees and lawns. There is a practical purpose for them: brief exposure to nature improves intellectual performance. Science agrees: a University of Michigan study “The Cognitive Benefits of Interacting with Nature” concluded that a short exposure to nature restores directed attention abilities far better than a walk down a city street.

“Like Universities, the tech industry invests heavily in open space. Basic needs for exercise, food, the ability to comfortably say hello to people outside the immediate work group drive companies like Google, Pixar, Apple, and Microsoft to create plenty of open space, inside and outside of their corporate campuses. Some of my best programming years were spent in Santa Monica at Boingo Wireless in the Water Garden complex right next door to the Yahoo Center. All it took was a short walk downstairs and I would find myself next to a wide, duck-filled lake surrounded by trees. In Yahoo’s case, it is a large garden and plaza, leading to a park and playground. Both Yahoo and the Water Garden are built on top of...underground parking lots!

“Like companies, cities are in serious competition for creative and visionary people. The smart cities look beyond square footage of office space, numbers of parking spaces, and really think: what do people need in order to grow? Ann Arbor has a large space on top of its new underground parking lot, a

parcel located in the middle of Ann Arbor’s current civic offerings. With the strong impetus to concentrate young workers and residents downtown, this is the perfect spot in which to build Ann Arbor’s central ‘mental reset zone.’ Such a space will advertise itself, as so many tech employees are already making use of the parking lot below.”



Question: How will safety be addressed?

The constant flow of pedestrians through the park is its best security. A well-used park is self-policing.

In addition, we expect that the City’s normal procedures for monitoring safety in the underground parking ramp will be extended to the surface of the ramp. Coordination of security measures by city police, the Ann Arbor District Library, the AATA Blake Terminal, the DDA parking garage and city parks have the potential to make this area a safe and active area of downtown.

An additional option which we have explored is a large digital screen for showing movies at night. During the day, it could show what cameras are observing in the park. This would be part of the fun. Kids would love to see themselves cavorting on the big screen.

Question: Won’t a new park on the block just extend the problems observed at Liberty Plaza?

We have given a lot of thought to this. The problems at Liberty Plaza are instantly relieved when more people arrive, as for a musical concert, or when a group of school children on a field trip take a break in the Plaza. As long as one demographic group seems to own the park, others are hesitant to come. We think that having a larger, very active park along with the pedestrian traffic generated by the entrance to the underground parking decks on the same block will insure steady foot-traffic of all kinds of people through Liberty Plaza and will help to solve the perceived problems there.

We envision that the Library Green park will share the site with a building of some type (needed to cover the entrance and exit ramps to the underground parking, and to restore the diagonal connection to Division Street). This structure could incorporate amenities such as a coffee house, a platform for outdoor performances, possibly a skate-changing room in the winter. It should be designed to have windows facing the park. “Eyes on the park” will discourage the kinds of illegal activities that have taken hold at Liberty Plaza.



Ann Arbor friends playing chess at the Imagine a Park Day in Library Green July 2012

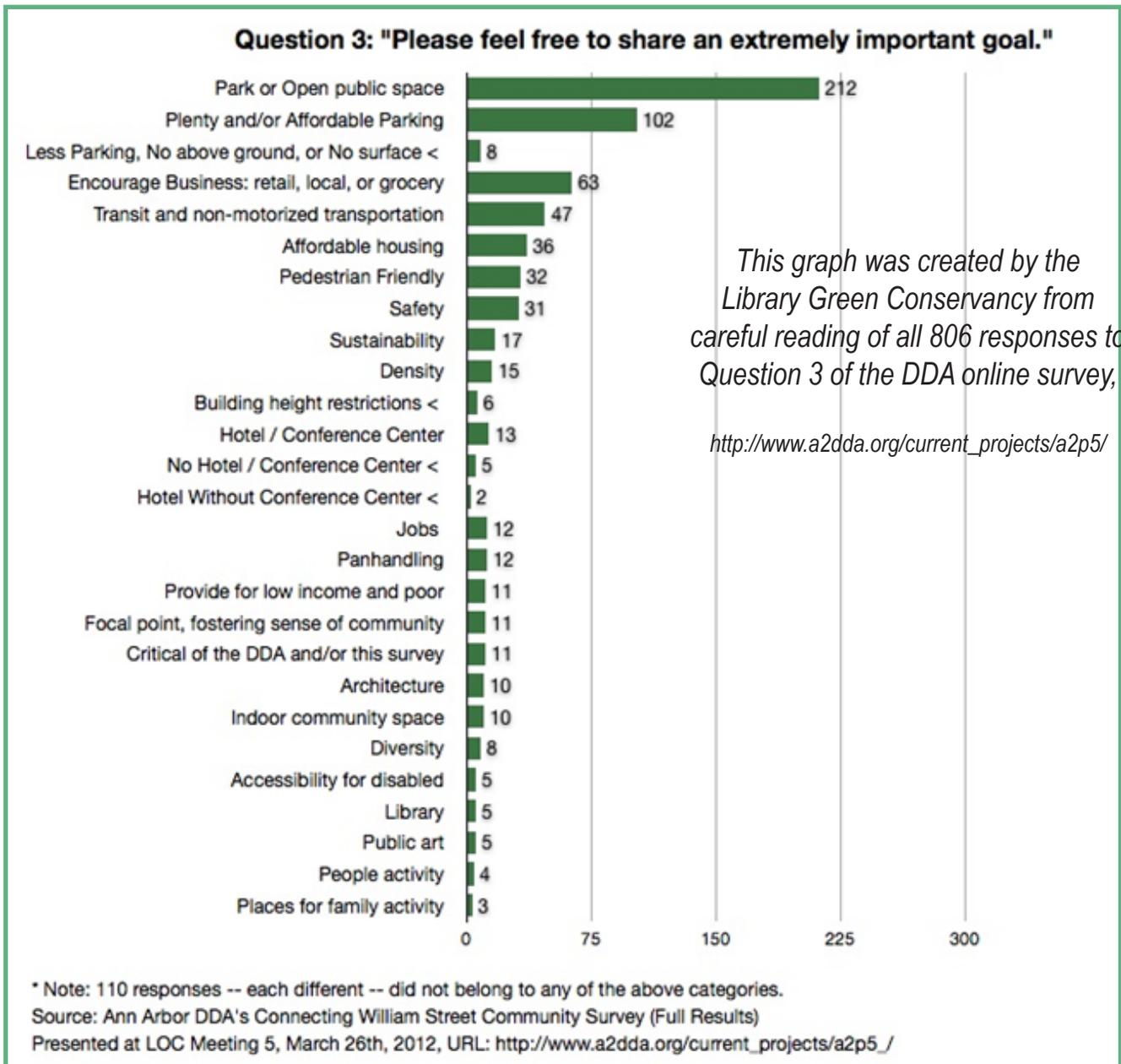
Question: What Do Citizens Want? The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) Has Gathered Public Input, But Has Ignored the Call for Public Open Space in the Recommendations

The recent DDA exercise featuring “scenarios” had boxes to check for several kinds of development on five city-owned lots on or near William Street. Retail, Office, Indoor Performance Space, Residential—these were among the options. Missing was a box for Public Open Space, Urban Park, or Community Green.

The same defect marred the DDA online survey of public opinion in early 2012. The survey offered a dozen or so possible responses to each question, for people to choose. A choice of “park,” or “open plaza,” or “green space,” was not offered. However, the survey included several open-ended questions inviting respondents to expand on the choices that

were offered. Many people gladly named parks, green space, public open space, outdoor performance space, and other names for what they felt was missing from the survey.

When asked open-ended questions, a significant proportion of respondents took the opportunity to ask for a park. Depending on the question, they ranged from 1/6 to 1/3 of respondents. These are people who made an effort to put into their own words what was missing from the questionnaire. Other respondents, with very few exceptions, did not oppose a park. They used the space to mention other goals. These are highly motivated citizens and voters.



IV. A Park for All Seasons

Parks generate economic benefits through Placemaking:

“Placemaking is the creation of a dynamic, attractive public space to revitalize and bring new investment to a downtown neighborhood.”

Recent article on Place Making in Michigan: <http://www.pps.org/placemaking-in-michigan/>



Question: How can a downtown park attract new enterprises to Ann Arbor?

Here is an unsolicited letter from a young professional business owner living in Indianapolis.

“I currently live in Indianapolis, am 43 years old, and own a business. A few years ago, I began researching smaller cities that might offer a higher quality of life now and into retirement.

“I visited 41 cities in the eastern half of the US. Many are on ‘Best Places to Live’ lists. How does Ann Arbor compare? Like many places I’ve visited, Ann Arbor’s downtown is vibrant, walkable and has character. And, like the others, Ann Arbor has an abundance of arts and culture, and a highly educated population. But what stood out about Ann Arbor were its urban neighborhoods – areas like the Old West Side and Burns Park, with quiet, tree-lined streets filled with charming, historic bungalows. Compared to those in the East, these houses are relatively affordable and sit on generously sized lots. These incredibly appealing Ann Arbor neighborhoods are within walking or biking distance to a hustling and bustling downtown.

“That’s one part of the magic formula that so many people – from young professionals to baby boomers – are looking for.

“Which is why Ann Arbor currently sits at the top of my short list, but with one major caveat. One of the things that instantly struck me about Ann Arbor was a lack of urban green spaces.

“In fact, Ann Arbor appears to have less urban green space than any other city on my list. This is troubling, and I was not expecting this from a city that had a reputation for being ‘green’.

“Downtown Indianapolis contains numerous green spaces. These spaces are ‘human-friendly’ and break up the monotony of concrete and steel. They are a significant source of natural beauty in an area not blessed with views of mountains or oceans. Green spaces invite locals and visitors to relax, connect, and ‘stay a while.’ This has been shown to be good for people’s health and good for the local economy. These spaces can also serve as revenue-producing venues for outdoor arts and music events.

“Ann Arbor is at a turning point. It can choose now to make urban green spaces a priority, or it can choose to fill in its few remaining open urban spaces with more commercial development. The latter will contribute to congestion and a generic urban footprint. This will certainly not help Ann Arbor’s case when it competes with the other locales on my list that offer stunning natural geography and urban green spaces. You’ve taken impressive steps to create a greenbelt around the city; now is the time to establish a ‘green core’ in the city.”

Thank you

Christine Freiman

Question: Where in downtown can children play?

A longtime resident speaking before the Parks Advisory Committee about the need for a downtown park asked:

“What memory of Ann Arbor will my granddaughter have in the future? Will she remember swan boats; a sprinkle pool; a funky favorite bench?” She cited several other examples from memorable urban parks in other cities, and said “the point is that Ann Arbor has no urban parks, and no city staff or elected body is making it a priority. . . We have monster buildings, and a city hall that some can’t find,” she said, “but there is no downtown public space that defines the character of Ann Arbor as a city of trees.”

She asked that an urban park become a priority. “Where is the play space for all of us? Where are the setbacks? . . . I want to take my granddaughter to play, to rest, to see grass and a sculpture or anything that other cities have, along with new development. I want her to remember something very special about her second city when she visits me. It’s great to have visitors to Ann Arbor’s restaurants and galleries, and it’s important to have people living and working downtown. All of these people need gathering places—a downtown urban park—to be developed and maintained. Who knows?” she said. “With encouragement, we might even form a foundation to help maintain these special places that we will never regret having planned for.”



Library Green Conservancy

Now Is the Time for Ann Arbor's Central Park

The City has acted upon the Calthorpe recommendation to construct an underground parking garage under the library parking lot, but not on the open space park recommendations. This structure should have had a green roof, not forty surface parking spaces that only serve to dissuade motorists from using the now abundant underground spaces.

The Library Green Conservancy proposes that now is the time to develop Ann Arbor's central urban park and that it should be located on top of the new underground structure. Our advocacy is for a public place, a center for community activities, of mixed and multi, four-season use, basically green and open with the possibility of an over-the-road upper level plaza and community building (low density) including a connecting way to Liberty Plaza park.

Many public spaces in America are maintained by not-for-profit "Conservancies", organized for public benefit, run democratically by local residents in consultation and cooperation with governmental units. It was for this purpose that Ann Arbor residents created the Library Green Conservancy, open to all Ann Arborites and friends of our town in support of the Library Green vision.

The wide public agreement about public space, the library green endeavor, and the creative contributions of so many have both heartened us, and left us frustrated. The official decision-makers seem not to hear.

This "Citizen's Report" is a public dissent from the DDA report and is a product of the Library Green Conservancy.

**View our web site:
<http://a2centralpark.org>**

If You Want Some Green:

- Let Park Commission know
- Write or speak at Council
- Tell your friends



Concert in
Dexter
Town Square
Gazebo

Notes:

This report was prepared by citizen volunteers using donated materials and employing no paid staff or consultant. Drawings and photos are to stimulate discussion and "visioning" and are not intended as concrete proposals. Special thank you to artist Stephan Trendov for "concept park" on front cover and page 6.

When we say "park" we mean to include public open space whether green, paved, or a combination, used for relaxation, recreation, cultural events and performances and to delight passersby.

References: Links to articles on the economic benefits of urban parks and open space and a Review of the Calthorpe Report of 2006 are at <http://a2centralpark.org>

April 2013