

Comments on Library Lot Proposal

6 April 2017

Mayor and members of City Council,

For years the two of us as concerned residents have been monitoring the evolution of proposals for the Library Lot, from underground parking to high-rise tower. We all agree it is a significant and consequential project and will serve as an iconic image for the city for many years. At this critical point in time, we present four questions to be considered before a final decision is made.

1. Redesign the structure with less mass and a smaller footprint.

Should the building be redesigned with a smaller footprint, resulting in a much-desired, more spacious plaza? The current proposal overwhelms the site. A less massive structure could still provide an important focus for the downtown. Also, a less intrusive mass would allow residents living on the south side of the Denali building, whose sun and view would be obliterated with the current scheme, to retain some of this amenity.

2. The city should keep possession of the open space portion of the site.

Although we feel the developer has presented a project with a desired mix of uses, the public plaza needs to be carefully designed and developed as the city's most prominent open space—a central focus for public activities and events. Can this best be accomplished by the city retaining control of this open space, but giving responsibility for its programming, maintenance, and security to an existing community organization or agency, as is done in many other cities? Is it reasonable to assume an accepting organization could receive adequate and continuing funding for this collectively from a variety of sources, including the developer, the city, the DDA, and/or a donors endowment? Could such an arrangement be extended to Liberty Square as well?

3. Further negotiate the price of the Library Lot property with CORE Spaces.

From our understanding, most of the discussion regarding the project is based on three options for sale of the property: CORE will pay the city \$10 million to allow for a maximum square footage structure; CORE would pay \$5 million or so for the right to build a smaller structure; or there would be no sale. Has there been any hard negotiating on this—i.e., asking CORE to pay \$10 million for the right to build a smaller structure? If pressed, would they be willing to downsize the structure, as is desired by many, and pay the asking price to be able to do it? This could result in a win for CORE (with a very prominent project) and a win-win for the city (full payment with for a more desirable building). In our opinion, now is the critical time for such hard negotiation.

4. The city should negotiate for a shorter lease for underground parking spaces.

According to our calculations, each parking space in the underground structure cost \$71,000 to construct; showing these truly are prime spaces. Should CORE be required to pay a premium price and/or reduce the number of dedicated spaces, with a lease that continues over a shorter time period (e.g., 20 years) to give the city greater flexibility in the future?

Finally, we urge you to not make a decision on this project until there has been a genuine conversation with the citizens of Ann Arbor regarding these questions. A working session with three-minute limits is not sufficient for a project with this significance for the future of Ann Arbor's downtown. We suggest time be set aside in forums when the public can engage with all Council members in a back-and-forth, "round-table" dialogue about the many issues the project entails. Although there has been community input, Council should through the media expressly encourage citizens who have not yet made statements to give their opinions and share ideas. We also support the statement of the DDA's Citizens Advisory Council that makes reference to the

larger context of how this development relates to the surrounding block, and feel more study needs to be done on this perspective.

Although years have been spent on this project proposal, the current proposal is not acceptable. We feel the selection of CORE as developer and John Myefski as architect is a good one, and they have shown flexibility and willingness to give the city what it asks for. It is time to ask them to design a project that works best for the city and its future. We love this city, as you do, and desire a development that truly represents Ann Arbor's civic nature. As a member of City Council, you are in a key role to determine whether Ann Arbor ultimately has a true community space at the Library Lot, or unfortunately ends up with an overscaled private investment project with an inadequate plaza in front of it. We trust you will make the right decision.

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P.S.: Ann Arbor needs a great public space to become a "strong town." We encourage you to review an online article, "Strong Towns have Great Public Spaces," at <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2017/3/21/strong-towns-have-great-public-spaces>. It is a wonderful statement advocating the need for well-designed public spaces.