



Legislation Text

File #: 14-0255, **Version:** 1

TITLE:

Proposed Improvements to Town Commons

PURPOSE: The purpose of this item is to present to the Board the results of the Town Commons Study which includes a proposed concept plan

DEPARTMENT: Public Works

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INFORMATION:

Introduction:

The Town Commons area was built in 1996 and is the host to many different types of events - the weekly Farmers' Market, Recreation and Parks annual events (including Carrboro Day, July 4th, Music Festival, and Halloween), paid reservations, non-profit fundraising efforts, and special events such as the Get Out The Vote rally in 2008 and the Tift Merritt concert in Sept of 2012. Activities taking place under the shelters and on the grounds.

Farmers' Market representatives approached Town staff about the possibility of doing major grounds improvements and indicated they would actively help raise money for such a project. Because of the multiple types of activities that take place on the Town Commons and the fact that these activities have evolved over time, Town staff felt that any major improvements should have a comprehensive approach and take into account all existing activities and possible future activities. Funding for an initial study / concept design was provided in the FY13-14 budget and supplemented by the Farmers' Market.

In the summer / fall of 2013, initial meetings were held with Town staff and the Farmers' Market rep to discuss various project aspects and an on-line survey was utilized to get feed-back from the public about various activities on the commons (survey results attached). Based upon this feedback, Town staff developed a project scope for the study which was used to solicit proposals from Landscape Architecture Firms. Public Works, in conjunction with Recreation and Parks selected a firm with similar experience designing small, flexible spaces with multiple uses. The selected consulting firm worked with Town staff and Farmers' Market representatives to gain a comprehensive understanding of the site's needs, yielding 3 potential concepts that were then narrowed down to one.

Conceptual Improvements:

The resulting final concept plan, selected by staff members from Public Works, Economic Development, and Recreation and Parks, builds upon the existing structure, but implements wider uses for the site. All existing physical structures remain in place, with only minor alterations; widening the distance between the columns on the West and South ends of the pavilions. Straight line concrete walkways replace the gravel arc in the outfield, creating north / south and east/west walkways that also functions as drive isles for market vendors. These walkways create a square shaped pedestrian flow cycle around the market. Updated turf paver systems are installed on either side of these isles in order to provide structurally supported parking spaces that protect the turf and prevent erosion. In an effort to provide additional recreational space on the site, the existing Bim Street adjacent parking lot is re-designed and split into two lots, one north and one south. In between these two new lots is another open grass area that provides an expanded opportunity for venue functions (play space, stage set up, movie screen, etc.).

This plan accomplishes the task of combining aesthetics with form and function. The vending space becomes more organized from a visual standpoint, the walkways create a framed space, and the subgrade turf pavers provide structural reinforcement. Overall, this plan increases site function and versatility, while only minimally impacting existing customer parking with the new configuration of the parking lot adjacent to Bim Street. In addition, it creates supplemental vendor parking locations and alleviates some of the carry-in vending spots.

Parking Data		
Data	Existing Site	Update Design
Customer Parking	52	50
Farmer Parking	64	67
Vending Stalls - No Parking	12*	9*
* Gazebo Area Tent / West Wing Vendors		

Phasing and Fiscal Considerations:

To perhaps help facilitate construction and balance budget costs, provisions have been made for a phased approach (see table below). Phase I constructs the walkways and all associated parking spaces while Phase II focuses on the re-designed Bim Street adjacent parking and added open space areas. Phase III is an option that deals with the front of the Town Hall complex, re-directing the vehicular access and tying the two open spaces together. This option closes off the Laurel Ave section of the driveway and re-locates the through access to a new driveway next to the fire station. The option also connects the traffic island in between Laurel Ave and Weaver Street to the Town Hall Complex. This effectively removes the problematic intersection of Laurel Ave and Main Street and calms through traffic. Laurel Ave still connects to Weaver Street. Phase III is a suggestion made by the design firm and was not directly incorporated in to this project plan view. It does, however,

complete the space, creating unity between the front and back of the Town Hall complex and was viewed as a positive attribute by the Market Board and Town Staff, including Planning and Public Works.

Town Commons Improvements Cost Estimate Summary		
Phase I	\$436,937.00	
Phase II	\$346,374.00	
Phases I & II Subtotal	\$783,311.00	
Phase III	\$50,000.00 to	\$90,000.00
Project Total:	\$833,311.00	\$873,311.00
Note: estimates include engineering design and contingencies		
*dependent upon designed sidewalk width		

Reception:

The concept design, including Phase III, was first presented to the Farmers' Market Board on August 25, 2014 and met with generally favorable reviews. The meeting generated a positive discussion and some additional thoughts on the way vendors might interact with the new vending space. Slight adjustments to the parking criteria were made as a result of this presentation and the updated plan was presented again to the Market Board on October 27, 2014 to a positive reception. There seemed to be enthusiasm for the overall benefit to the Town and Market that the proposed updates could provide.

FISCAL & STAFF IMPACT: Several avenues are being explored by Town staff to assist with funding. Phasing is being considered, recreational grants or agriculture/farmers' markets grants may be available, and the Farmers' Market is also involved with fundraising efforts.

RECOMMENDATION: It is recommended the Board of Aldermen accept the report and provide feedback/ further direction to Town Staff.