

RENOVATING PHILLIP HART PLAZA: A WHITE PAPER

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What is it about Hart Plaza?

Over the past few years, the economy of the Detroit has gotten significantly better, the unemployment rate has dropped .8% (BLS, 2018), the average income has risen for the first time since 2000, and the poverty rate has lowered by 4% (Detroit News, 2017). Detroit is regaining its stature but it still has a long way to go. Infrastructure has been long neglected in the city and the neglect is evident especially when looking at the parks. Hart Plaza, opened in 1975, is one of the first places most tourists see when coming to visit however the design of the plaza itself is not very accommodating for most activities that one would see in a park.

Hart Plaza's nature and greenery is lacking compared to major parks in other cities such as Central Park in New York, Millennium Park in Chicago, and Forsyth Park in Georgia. Compare Hart Plaza to Campus Martius; one contains lots of aspects of nature, from grass and trees along with plenty of tables and buildings that are needed for providing entertainment. People then go to Campus Martius to hang out because of the friendly atmosphere and landscaping. Both the location of Campus Martius and Hart Plaza are perfect for use as they are less than a mile apart. However, Hart Plaza is completely made out of concrete, has little to no

green spaces, and contains harsh brutalist structures that do not seem inviting for people themselves. This leads to a negative feedback loop: As less people go to Hart Plaza, less emphasis is given to this park which in turns leads to less work on the park. This is what is happening to Hart Plaza right now and as new-found focus is turned towards the riverfront, we need to change how we look at parks.

Hart Plaza's location is perfect for a revival because of its location next to both the Renaissance Center and the Joe Louis Arena as well as being next to the riverfront. This location allows for easy access to tourists who come to visit the Auto Show and both employees and visitors to the Renaissance Center. The



proximity to downtown would then allow users who are already outside easy access to the greater downtown area and the many parks that populate it. However, Hart Plaza does not attract many visitors from both of these two locations which is a severe loss of potential and only hurts Detroit.

What is it About Parks?

The benefits of functioning parks are well documented and are well known to those who frequent them. Pioneer Courthouse Square in Portland Oregon was previously going to be turned into a parking structure but after a successful redevelopment the park has greatly contributed to Portland's rise and has ranked as the world's fourth best public squares (Project for Public Spaces, 2004). Hart Plaza and Pioneer Courthouse Square share many parallels: both areas are located close to the center of downtown and both Pioneer and Hart are made up of concrete instead of a greener location than Central Park. The stark difference is that the Portland City Government decided early on to redevelop Pioneer Courthouse which helped Portland's booming economy. A central area where people can come together and an area where groups

can congregate contributes to the local economy as well as the health and environmental benefits of having more green spaces. (Planning, 2018).

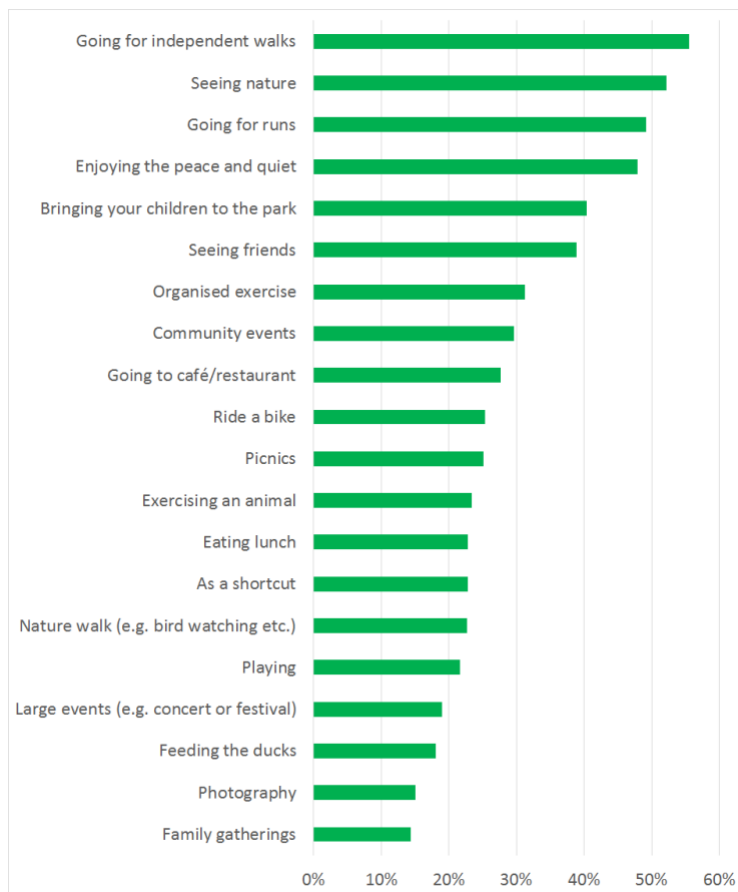


Figure 1:
Top 20 uses of parks (U.K. Parliament, 2016)

festivals and decrepit infrastructure.

Parks not only benefit the economy though as nature and the general community is bettered with gathering as well as having more green areas which contribute to the health of the community. The more people that are outside and walking around, the better everyone's mental health and

With parks come people who then use the parks which in turn spurs economic development as retailers now see more people concentrated in an area. Parks are easy areas to gather large crowds of people and keep them for an extended amount of time. One goal of parks is to get people to go outside and explore more and Hart Plaza is in a good position for this. However, due to an abundance of parking structures and a lack of easy entrances to the park from the Renaissance Center and Joe Louis Arena, this location is wasted. A better-looking park is also a larger tourist draw which contributes to the economy as well. Tourists would rather visit places that look nice and are geared towards pedestrians and those walking rather than large amphitheatres made for



physical health is (TPL, 2006). The environmental benefits of parks are highlighted in areas such as Bellevue Washington where parks double as storm water management areas in which rain water drain into the green areas of a park instead of flooding the less permeable concrete which is found so much in cities. Cities can also enjoy diverse wildlife and fauna with a green park as many species of animals can call the park a home.

How to Fix Hart Plaza

Fixing Hart Plaza is not going to be easy. For one, Hart Plaza will have to go through a large remodel the final result of which would serve both the visitors to the many festivals that are hosted in the park. The new design of Hart Plaza will entail larger open spaces for music and the people who will use the park daily but will focus on smaller areas made for gatherings instead of large amphitheaters. An example of a good in-between are places like the Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Chicago (Wikipedia, 2018) which allows for both green



areas as well as a large amphitheater that is used for music festivals. However, the problems come again when the amphitheater isn't used. The final result is still not as good as New York's Central Park which is more of a collection of smaller areas but instead tries to emulate the feeling of Pioneer Courthouse Park in size and scale.

A remodel of Hart Plaza would include tearing up the original gray concrete and pavilion and replacing it with more green space and parks. More grass and more benches that are welcoming will encourage people to use the park more instead of right now in which the design is openly hostile against users. An excess of trees would provide plenty of shade and benefit all users of the park by allowing people to stay for extended periods of time. Access to both the Joe Louis Arena and the Renaissance Center would also have to be simplified to encourage those in both buildings to use the park more times. Again, this can be solved with

smarter planning and better access to nature as better paths can be created in which the surroundings are both nice and hospitable to those using it.

The community of Detroit can also help this by petitioning the Detroit City Council to care more about Hart Plaza and understanding more about how parks can benefit the community.

Portland's Pioneer Courthouse's renovation was made in possible by many small donations by the local community, which totaled \$750,000, and a large effort to better their own city (Portland Walking Tours, 2015). There are also many community organizations such as The Greening of Detroit, Detroit Riverfront Conservatory, and

Downtown Detroit Partnership which do many work relating to public spaces. Any resident of Detroit wishing to change this should research more about the many organizations in Detroit.



Do You Want Your Park
to Look Like This?



Phillip J.Hart
Plaza Detroit

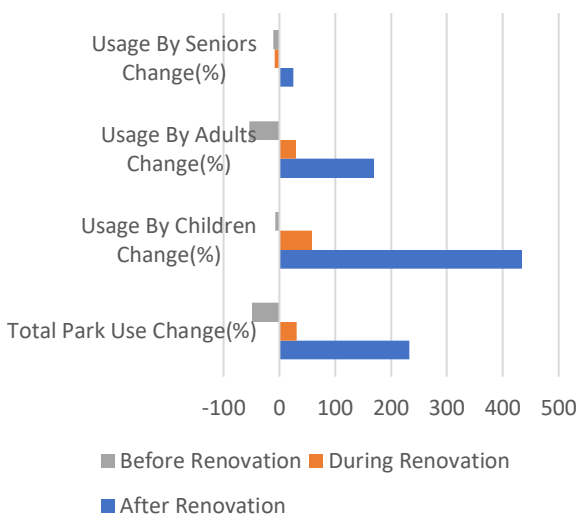
Or This?



Pioneer Courthouse
Park, Portland

Why Should We Renovate Hart Plaza?

Park Usage Before, During and
After Renovation



Park Usage in San
Francisco Greatly Increased
After Renovating Parks

15,000,000

People who visit Detroit
Annually. Parks leave a
good impression

Increase in price per
square foot for
properties near parks

\$82

5.9

Million dollars saved by the City
of Philadelphia by improving
rainwater absorbtion in parks

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