

EDITORIALS

Perpetual plus

Partnership ensures new Downtown park has bright prospects

Supporting the development of Columbus Commons, the Downtown park that will replace City Center mall, was a natural move for the Franklin County commissioners and Metro Parks. The county benefits from a vibrant Downtown, and Metro Parks is charged with providing green spaces for central Ohioans to enjoy.

But along with the dollars they are committing to help create the park, they gave the priceless gift of permanence.

By insisting that the 6-acre core of the park be subject to a permanent conservation easement, they ensured that Columbus' own central park will remain a part of the landscape forever.

That gives the city and its public partners in the park project added opportunities and a responsibility to plan the space as creatively as possible. Because it's never going away, central Ohioans can invest in Columbus Commons with confidence.

The park's potential to improve city life is enormous.

Most obvious and probably soonest, it will be a place for workers, visitors and residents Downtown to stretch a leg and feel the sun without leaving the bustle of the city behind.

But it can and should be much more.

Central Ohio's growing network of bikeways, under the stewardship of Metro Parks, could converge into a hub in Columbus Commons. Bike rentals could allow visitors to venture out to other attractions, as near as the Scioto Riverfront parks Downtown, midrange to Scioto Audubon Metro Park on the Whittier Peninsula and, for the energetic, to adjacent counties via the Olentangy or the Ohio to Erie bike trails.

An exciting bike destination in the center of the city would be a tremendous boost to the area's already growing bicycle scene.

The underground parking garage that once served shoppers remains in place under the park site and will help provide electricity, water and other support to park users, easing the transition from quiet, green oasis to rollicking festival grounds.

A planned amphitheater will give the Columbus Association for the Performing Arts, another park partner, an exciting new venue for performances.

Columbus long has enjoyed an economy healthier than the rest of Ohio, and new housing developments, stores and offices have been plentiful. But city parks have been another story. Planting Columbus Commons in the middle of Downtown gives the city an amenity that urban planners once thought essential but received short shrift in earlier Columbus growth spurts.

Thanks to foresight on the part of Metro Parks and the county, the heart of Downtown won't ever again be without a green gathering space.