

Concept Paper for Constitution Plaza

February 2017

Background

Recent survey data from graduating seniors make it clear that most Trinity students “wish that they had discovered Hartford earlier” and regretted “not spending more time in Hartford” during their time at Trinity. Since Trinity’s departure from the site of the current State Capital in the 1870’s to the Summit campus, there has been periodic discussion of the relative advantages of having a downtown footprint again.

In 2014, Trinity College decided to buy property in downtown Hartford. In an auction, we purchased 200 Constitution Plaza for \$2.1 M. At the time, we (the administration and the trustees) decided to make concrete our commitment to “being in and of Hartford” with a footprint in the Central Business District. After the purchase of 200 CP, a planning committee of faculty and staff members began to envision this location as a critical spoke for collaborations with the other Hartford institutions of higher education that are downtown: St. Joseph’s graduate school of pharmacy, Capital Community College, UConn’s graduate executive business school, and the new UConn undergraduate campus (opening in summer 2017, it will be the second largest campus after the Storrs location with an estimated 3000 students), as well as businesses, cultural endeavors, and other non-profits that are assembled downtown.

In 2016, after long and successful negotiations with a prospective buyer (BHN) and significant guidance from trustees, we sold 200 Constitution Plaza and leased back space at 10 Constitution Plaza and the third floor of 1 Constitution Plaza at very favorable rates. We are on a fast-track to open our downtown presence in fall 2017, coincident with UConn’s arrival to downtown Hartford.

The Importance of Ideas and Space

First and foremost, our vision for Constitution Plaza needs to support our new mission statement: Engage. Connect. Transform. We see this location as critical to engage our students, faculty and staff in our urban location; connect to Hartford, both its residents and other institutions; and be a driving force to transform individual lives, as well as the City. If Trinity College is where the liberal arts meet the real world, our space in Constitution Plaza will be the most visible manifestation of this commitment.

Very broadly, 10 Constitution Plaza will be our showcase space supporting innovation and community outreach. 1 Constitution Plaza will be space to develop graduate and certificate programs with the possibility of subleasing some of the space to one of the institutions of the Hartford Consortium for Higher Education. We propose to delay the renovation of 1 Constitution Plaza (for one year) until we have developed further programming for this space, and hence, it is not the focus of this memo.

Listed below are the primary components we envision in 10 Constitution Plaza. Each of these components is described below.

- A Liberal Arts Action Lab
- Maker Space
- WeWork-styled (without the beer) flexible space for entrepreneurial activities
- A Base for Internships Downtown

The Liberal Arts Action Lab (LAAL)

The mission of LAAL is to empower Trinity students and their community partners to collaboratively become change agents who identify and solve complex real world problems by harnessing the skills, knowledge, and creativity of all participants. We are currently seeking another higher education partner to join us in collaboratively developing this concept. This is a perfect opportunity for cross-institutional collaboration to make Hartford feel more like a college town.

A governing principle of the LAAL is that true civic engagement means recognizing that both Trinity College and neighborhood partners have rich sets of skills, knowledge, and expertise which can be combined to address significant real world problems. The issues and problems that participants in the LAAL will address will arise from the needs of the communities of Hartford. Participants will collectively identify specific problems or issues that need addressing and work together to assess the best way of researching these problems using liberal arts skills sets. Students would work with partners to define problems, gather and visualize appropriate forms of data, write up reports, and present them to appropriate entities who may be in positions to enact change.

LAAL will embody a new model for the liberal arts and connect Trinity to the real world beyond its borders, as well as provide practical training for our students in a manner that will likely increase employability. Just as importantly, it will involve genuine partnerships with community groups from across Hartford who will be involved from the planning stage onward. Not surprisingly, strong partnerships with Hartford are a consistent theme in our Bicentennial Strategic Planning Committee, as a distinct feature of a Trinity College education. LAAL will be a space to live that vision.

MakerSpace

A makerspace is a “place where people can gather to create, invent, tinker, explore, and discover using a variety of tools and materials.” [See [Educause: 7 things you should know about Makerspaces and Defining Makerspaces: What the Research Says](#)]. The essential elements of makerspaces are place, people, and making things. Very simply put, it’s a place to engage, connect, and transform. When we designed the Crescent Street liberal arts building, our engineering department had hoped that the plans would include a makerspace, however, we were unable to fit it into the final design for that building. Hence, we propose to fulfill that need at Constitution Plaza.

Makerspaces combine equipment, community, and education to design, prototype and create manufactured and creative works that wouldn't be possible to produce with the resources available to individuals working alone. These spaces can take the form of loosely organized individuals sharing space and tools. They are not overly programmed or prescribed; they are zones for self-directed, hands-on learning coupled with tools and raw materials that support invention. Interactions among inventors in these spaces foster collaborative learning and offer peer support and assistance. In brief, these spaces promote multidisciplinary thinking, innovation, and invention.

Creating a makerspace in Constitution Plaza will support Trinity students, but also contribute to the innovative ecosystem in the heart of Hartford. This is the kind of creative space that our students need to encourage their entrepreneurial spirit. Additionally, the high density of other institutions in downtown Hartford lends itself to joint projects and cross-institutional collaborations in a manner that would not be possible on the Summit campus.

Flexible Co-Working Designed Spaces

According to a recent survey of seniors at Trinity and peer colleges, Trinity students are more likely than their peers to work in start-ups and small businesses after graduation. How can we best prepare our students for this environment in which they may work? We think that the answer is by creating this type of work environment during their time at Trinity. For Constitution Plaza we envision workspace that's flexible and that fosters community and collaboration, nurturing creativity and innovation.

Currently the State of Connecticut is investing significantly in entrepreneurship and innovation. For example, Public Act 16-3 provides state funding to examine innovation and entrepreneurship at in-state public and independent institutions of higher education and to support innovation places/zones around the State. The State's long-term goal is to create an innovation ecosystem where more of the talent that is trained in CT colleges and universities want to remain in CT to work and where entrepreneurship helps to fuel the economy. Hartford

is a city that retains fewer of its college graduates than almost any metropolitan area in the US. How do we create an environment where more of our students want to stay and open small businesses to fuel the CT economy? One important step is to begin to create spaces and zones where innovators and entrepreneurs can work collaboratively to develop synergies and partnerships. Trinity has been deeply involved in the Hartford innovation place proposal and in the higher education working group to support innovation. We believe that Constitution Plaza provides an optimal place for a Hartford innovation ecosystem, and Trinity now has an opportunity to be an important hub.

A Base for Internships Downtown

In addition to these three specific space elements, 10 Constitution Plaza will be a downtown home base for students doing internships downtown. Relatedly, we envision “internship seminars” and other structured conversations with students about industry-specific internships taking place there. Given the other higher education institutions in the downtown area, it will also be a space to interact around some of these issues with the other college and university students (almost 30,000) in Greater Hartford.

Importance of Location

Hartford’s central business district is showing consistent growth and movement. Constitution Plaza is in the heart of this growth development. The Plaza complex includes the Spectra Boutique Apartments at 5 Constitution Plaza (which are fully leased) and the UConn Executive Business School at 100 Constitution Plaza. 777 Main (a set of high-end apartments) overlooks the Plaza and is within easy walking distance to the Plaza. A new CT government building and Hartford HealthCare headquarters are located on the eastern side of Constitution Plaza, and a dog park is planned for summer 2017. Constitution Plaza connects (as a continuous aboveground walkway) to the Front Street development, the new UConn undergraduate campus, the Front Street Lofts and the Front Street retail and restaurant spaces.

10 Constitution Plaza is the most prominent space on the plaza, at the crossroads that link many of the downtown initiatives. Our space in 1 Constitution Plaza overlooks the plaza and will highlight 10 Constitution Plaza's location. Trinity College is staged to play a prominent role in a growing downtown business district.

Importance of Timing

We plan to open 10 Constitution Plaza in fall 2017. We have an aggressive timeline because we would like to form specific and meaningful collaborations with our educational neighbors, as the political landscape and ground will shift with UConn's opening this summer. Also, we would like to consider holding the first-year seminar at Constitution Plaza for the new January cohort program in winter 2018 (first year students who will matriculate to Trinity in the winter, rather than the fall). Imagine if this first-year seminar, in the heart of the City, were to be a signature of the January cohort program. These factors would necessitate completion of the 10 Constitution Plaza renovations by December 2017.

Conclusion

We are developing plans for 10 Constitution Plaza to be a flexible, collaborative space in the hub of Hartford innovation activity. It will be signature space and a real and visible presence for Trinity in downtown. We will consider the programmatic and financial planning for 10 Constitution Plaza at a future time.