



CITY OF ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

100 North Fifth Avenue, P.O. Box 8647, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107-8647

www.a2gov.org

Administration (734)794-6210

Community Development Services (734) 622-9025

Parks & Recreation Services (734) 794-6230

Planning & Development Services - Building (734) 794-6267

Planning & Development Services - Planning (734) 794-6265

Community Services Area

Meeting Summary

Date: May 27, 2009

Time: 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

Location: CTN Studios, 2805 S. Industrial

Re: Area, Height & Placement—Community Wide Meeting #1

Attendees: 13 attendees; City of Ann Arbor—Jeff Kahan, Mark Lloyd, Connie Pulcifer

Part I. Comments and questions from meeting attendees:

1. How is this proposal going to impact the upcoming R4C study? Explain the proposed changes in the R4C zoning district.
2. Will the PUD/Planned Project process remain in place in the areas affected by the new standards?
3. How have you publicized these meetings? Have you engaged neighborhood groups?
4. Will you make available a sheet with a summary table of the proposed changes and exactly what areas will be affected? Can these be distributed at the public meetings?
5. What are the R2B setback changes? What happens with replacement buildings (i.e. after fire or demolition) where the new standards will be conflicting with the existing character of the neighborhood? For example, would the new construction replacing the burned Delta Upsilon house have to be closer to the right of way than all of the other homes in the neighborhood?
Follow-up: how does setback averaging affect setbacks in such circumstances?
6. What are the potential benefits to the environment and storm water management from these proposed standards?
7. A2D2 seems to encourage environmental responsibility through FAR bonuses for “green” construction features – will these AHP standards include any similar bonuses for the affected outlying districts?
8. How could these zoning changes impact housing near the downtown and campus areas, specifically in regards to maintaining a diversity of housing types available?

9. What has the planning department done in this process to work towards improving mass transit in the City? How can we get past funding problems and service gaps when talking about improving transit solely by increasing density? Bringing density won't improve transit if more transit service isn't provided.
10. Comment on the potential environmental benefits of the AHP. Can existing sites be updated through this process?
11. The Central Area Plan speaks to maintaining the character and scale of residential areas. How will the planning department cautiously approach these standard changes in order to reinforce the goal of retaining the current character and scale?
12. In regards to increasing height allowances, why shouldn't the City just require underground or below-building parking in order to take advantage of increased building heights instead of allowing it for all buildings?
13. What is the relationship between the proposed R1E district and affordable housing? Could this district turn into a de facto affordable housing district with small lots and small homes?
14. How do we deal with parking? The most vibrant urban areas (some seen in visuals provided) tend to have decks and shared parking—with these proposed standards, what is the vision for the commercial districts to create a "park once" pattern of development?

Part II. Meeting attendees completed feedback forms at the meeting's end. The forms are summarized below:

1. This meeting helped me understand the proposed amendments to the City's Area, Height and Placement standards.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree (2)	Strongly Agree (4)
-------------------	----------	---------	-----------	--------------------
2. The images in the PowerPoint presentation helped illustrate the proposed amendments.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral (2)	Agree (1)	Strongly Agree (3)
-------------------	----------	-------------	-----------	--------------------
3. I was given adequate opportunity to ask questions and provide comments at the community meeting.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree (1)	Strongly Agree (5)
-------------------	----------	---------	-----------	--------------------
4. Any other comments, questions, feedback, or ideas? (Feedback comments are recorded verbatim).
 - How will the R4C rework be integrated with this effort?
 - Connie has really nice handwriting!
 - Perhaps more schematics showing before/after positions of structures pre and post revisions
 - The summary sheet of changes sounds great! Also, a composite, color (or pattern) coded map showing minor, substantive, and major changes on one map with districts labeled on the parcels (maybe a fold-out?). Thanks!!
 - With all due respect, this is hardly a public involvement process. Work harder than you have to get the public involved and provide fuller input.
 - Very good presentation



CITY OF ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

100 North Fifth Avenue, P.O. Box 8647, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107-8647

www.a2gov.org

Administration (734)794-6210

Community Development Services (734) 622-9025

Parks & Recreation Services (734) 794-6230

Planning & Development Services - Building (734) 794-6267

Planning & Development Services - Planning (734) 794-6265

Community Services Area

Meeting Summary

Date: June 4, 2009

Time: 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

Location: Traverwood Branch Library Program Room, 3333 Traverwood Dr.

Re: Area, Height & Placement—Ward 1 Meeting

Attendees: 6 attendees; City of Ann Arbor—Jeff Kahan, Connie Pulcifer, Ethan Miller (intern)

Part I. Comments and questions from meeting attendees:

1. What is meant by “efficient” use of land? The slides that are shown for examples of inefficient land use have large tracts of grass—what’s wrong with that? It can be attractive.
2. When the few vacant properties are eventually built upon, will they fall under the old or proposed zoning standards?
3. With more of a property available for building (with increased FAR), won’t possible increase in impervious surfaces require a greater need for storm water detention?
4. How do alternative building materials (such as pervious pavement) count towards storm water detention requirements?
5. I appreciate the desire to put in place code that allows for more efficient land use in an attempt to curb future sprawl. Ann Arbor will certainly grow significantly over the next 10-15 years no matter what actions are taken, but if we manage the growth properly, we can make the City a better place.
6. How do you decide on the setback distances to use?
7. In residential zones, you say that shorter setbacks will create more active recreational spaces, but aren’t front lawns and gardens considered active recreational uses?
8. What is the amount of vacant commercial/retail space in Ann Arbor? Do we know what the demand for commercial/retail space is?
9. Does the planning department have a sense of how many potential projects have been lost because businesses or developers did not want to go through the hoops of a planned project or PUD (like the Mercedes Benz project referenced in the presentation)?

10. How do we manage open space when increasing density on site?
11. Could these proposed standards potentially have the effect of making more space available for building on a given site if parking goes under the structure, and therefore decreasing the amount of open space on the site?
12. What about increased noise for building occupants along busy streets that would now have shorter setback distances?
13. I find it difficult to imagine these shorter setbacks along high traffic corridors (for example, the short setbacks at Stadium Hardware and Bell's Diner on Stadium make people uncomfortable when walking in front of them).
14. Do you know how much fertilizer runoff into waterways could be avoided through redevelopment of the vast open lawn areas common in the research districts?
15. Do these changes affect anything that the University does in its building and development?

Part II. Meeting attendees completed feedback forms at the meeting's end. The forms are summarized below:

1. This meeting helped me understand the proposed amendments to the City's Area, Height and Placement standards.
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree (2) Strongly Agree (1)
2. The images in the PowerPoint presentation helped illustrate the proposed amendments.
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree (2) Strongly Agree (1)
3. I was given adequate opportunity to ask questions and provide comments at the community meeting.
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree (1) Strongly Agree (2)
4. Any other comments, questions, feedback, or ideas? (Feedback comments are recorded verbatim).
 - Reading the slides took too much time. Focus on the pictures and less on reading to the group.
 - Announce at the start of the meeting how much time there will be for questions which may be saved for the end!!
 - Shorter presentation.



CITY OF ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

100 North Fifth Avenue, P.O. Box 8647, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107-8647

www.a2gov.org

Administration (734)794-6210

Community Development Services (734) 622-9025

Parks & Recreation Services (734) 794-6230

Planning & Development Services - Building (734) 794-6267

Planning & Development Services - Planning (734) 794-6265

Community Services Area

Meeting Summary

Date: June 17, 2009

Time: 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

Location: Traverwood Library Branch Program Room, 3333 Traverwood Dr.

Re: Area, Height & Placement—Ward 2 Meeting

Attendees: 14 attendees; City of Ann Arbor—Jeff Kahan, Connie Pulcifer, Ethan Miller (intern)

Part I. Comments and questions from meeting attendees:

1. I've always been a fan of short setbacks; I like the idea of a single family district with smaller lot sizes so that people have the option of living on a smaller lot without having to be in a multi-family district.
2. Increasing FAR in commercial districts is concerning because while it may in theory encourage transit use, property owners aren't required to go along with making transit better (example of Arborland not renewing lease with AATA for major bus stop). Developers will definitely be interested in increased FAR, but not necessarily in accommodating transit. There should be guarantees that transit use will be accommodated in these areas.
3. Why have uncapped heights in some districts? This gives too much power to developers off the bat as opposed to Planning Commission having negotiating power. Would the FAR limits really rein in the height a developer could reasonably build in these areas? How tall could a building realistically be built in the districts with uncapped height and increased FAR? I would feel better if a cap were in place.
4. Could you achieve all of these proposed changes in a development through the PUD or Planned Project process?
5. Define PUD and Planned Project. How do they differ?
6. I think most Ann Arbor residents would not want uncapped height limits.
7. Developers often say that building vertically is more cost effective than building horizontally. Is this just to get more concessions for greater height? What is more cost effective?

8. Shorter setbacks in commercial districts gives developers more room to build but does not ensure transit benefits because the transit system isn't good to begin with.
9. AATA ridership has grown in recent years.
10. What about aesthetics? Who would want to walk along the streets with shorter setbacks along walls of brick and concrete close to the sidewalk? There should be a pleasant walking environment in these areas.
11. Wouldn't increased verticality be bad for elderly?
12. The slides don't really incorporate considerations for Michigan's winter weather conditions—many example slides were in warmer climates. Limited parking, even if there is a bus, makes destinations inconvenient.
13. If these changes pass, would the resulting increase in buildable land in the City increase land values and property tax revenues?
14. Setback numbers should be specific to place and context. If setbacks are shorter, then sidewalks should be wider in those areas.
15. Always consider trees when developing these standards.
16. Ann Arbor doesn't really have a problem attractive older people – what we need to do is be better at attracting younger people with areas that are more active and pedestrian friendly.
17. Altering the requirements in this way will give developers more control. This would be attractive to developers but may not produce desirable results for people living in the surrounding area, if the development has vacancies or is large and unattractive.
18. Could a large apartment building (like the 601 Forest project) be built anywhere but downtown based on these proposed changes?

Part II. Meeting attendees completed feedback forms at the meeting's end. The forms are summarized below:

1. This meeting helped me understand the proposed amendments to the City's Area, Height and Placement standards.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral (2)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (2)
-------------------	----------	-------------	-----------	--------------------
2. The images in the PowerPoint presentation helped illustrate the proposed amendments.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree (1)	Neutral	Agree (7)	Strongly Agree (1)
-------------------	--------------	---------	-----------	--------------------
3. I was given adequate opportunity to ask questions and provide comments at the community meeting.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-------------	-----------	----------------
4. Any other comments, questions, feedback, or ideas? (Feedback comments are recorded verbatim).
 - Packet could contain copy of overheads

- Too fast – too many abbreviations. Need to slow down.
- Put university owned property on map.
- Pre-circulate materials
- I got too confused with R2, C3 (the numbers and letters). They mean nothing to me. Be more specific about where this really would affect.
- You talk a lot about research (districts-ed.) – Pfizer area affects this district, is this area going to be affected?
- How does increasing building size increase permeability?
- Where is the charm? We have empty buildings. Do you really care what we want – in Plymouth Green; roundabouts, etc.? I'll try to like these changes – but where is the beauty, artistic side of all this – tenements are next I guess.
- 1. Arbitrary setback standards are not enough. Consider: 1) wider the setbacks, higher the buildings; 2) locations
- 2. Plan bike lanes whenever we plan the City
- 3. Think of trees as camouflage of the high buildings
- I'm extremely encouraged by the (proposed) changes and I only wish they'd been put in place years ago, so this new library could have been built as part of a redeveloped Plymouth Mall instead of on a greenfield half a mile away from the existing retail center. I've spent most of my life a mile from here, and I wish I'd been able to walk more places as a child. As a young person concerned about global warming and this region's economic survival, I believe a more compact urban form is absolutely necessary if we're to have a chance.
- Please publicize public meetings in Ann Arbor News.
- I think the form was helpful. It allowed community attendees to express reservations for intended zone changes. I can understand the necessity of increasing density within the city limits to counter sprawl and inefficient land use in the City. I realize that presenters wanted to encourage comments but Jeff and Connie could have taken greater advantage of defending the planning commission's rationale in these changes rather than just letting people let off steam with no rebuttal.
- The proposed package is a lot to swallow in one bite.



CITY OF ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

100 North Fifth Avenue, P.O. Box 8647, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107-8647

www.a2gov.org

Administration (734)794-6210

Community Development Services (734) 622-9025

Parks & Recreation Services (734) 794-6230

Planning & Development Services - Building (734) 794-6267

Planning & Development Services - Planning (734) 794-6265

Community Services Area

Meeting Summary

Date: July 1, 2009

Time: 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

Location: Cobblestone Farm, 2781 Packard Rd

Re: Area, Height & Placement—Ward 3 Meeting

Attendees: 13 attendees; City of Ann Arbor—Jeff Kahan, Connie Pulcifer, Andrea Milne (intern)

Part I. Comments and questions from meeting attendees:

1. What's the concern about uncapping the height?
2. What's the concern with tall buildings?
3. The community's concern is that tall buildings don't fit in with the traditional feel of Ann Arbor and we will lose the quality that attracts people to Ann Arbor.
4. There is a tall building on South University that is a blight on the neighborhood because it is under utilized. This is a result of allowing taller (uncapped) buildings.
5. A reasonable height seems to be a better approach.
6. Often times, higher density brings in crime and low quality food and retail.
7. We think the streetscapes are the most prized feature of our neighborhoods. Will reducing set backs create infill that will lose the integrity of this feature?
8. I don't understand the Cranbrook Village height change from 25'. Please explain.
9. Why is there such a large change in the C1B areas? Don't C1B lots border residential areas? These buildings will be too high.
10. Will there be requirements for percentage of land devoted to open space?
11. How will parking be regulated?
12. The R2A definition doesn't accurately describe our neighborhoods. There should be two separate duplex districts.

13. What constitutes a duplex? Current duplex developments are larger than they should be. The city should take this opportunity to be more specific.
14. Oakland and Church development does not fit in the neighborhood.
15. Won't the changes to R4C encourage teardowns? Are we going to end up with more big ugly boxes?
16. Why are setback changes being applied to R2A and R2B, but not R1A-E?
17. We need a clearer definition of hotels and motels. These are becoming places for students. A new style of living was not the intent.
18. The new R1E is a good idea, but where will it be located? Could it happen on Baldwin?
19. Where is R4E?
20. What is R4CD and where is it located? Should we just do away with it?
21. Regarding residential in research parks, I don't mind a cap on lawn, but not on open space. It is more attractive to walk next to trees and yard than a building. If that isn't required, would these places become less pedestrian friendly? We need to make sure there is a balance of green with increased densities.
22. Some kinds of research aren't compatible with residential areas (i.e. chemical research). Are there any photo examples of how this has been done? I'm concerned about safety.
23. A four-story building may be inappropriate next to neighborhoods.
24. How do we know when density gets too high?
25. What is the definition of "new construction"? What are the new requirements for rebuilding my home if it burns down in a fire?
26. It seems that the height requirements are misleading. I think of height as from the bottom to the top, but the way you measure means a 45' building could actually be higher than 45'.
27. Define street ROW
28. How does AHP interface with A2D2?

Part II. Meeting attendees completed feedback forms at the meeting's end. The forms are summarized below:

1. This meeting helped me understand the proposed amendments to the City's Area, Height and Placement standards.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree (1)	Neutral	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (1)
-------------------	--------------	---------	-----------	--------------------
2. The images in the PowerPoint presentation helped illustrate the proposed amendments.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral (1)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (1)
-------------------	----------	-------------	-----------	--------------------

3. I was given adequate opportunity to ask questions and provide comments at the community meeting.

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree Neutral (1) Agree (4) Strongly Agree

4. Any other comments, questions, feedback, or ideas? (Feedback comments are recorded verbatim).

- I have no problem with tall buildings if contained in close proximity to one another. My concern is that limiting setbacks will cause parking problems
- Connie and Jeff were very open to questions and comments and worked hard to clarify/answer issues. It was encouraging to feel that our concerns were heard.
- Of buildings shown as examples to be followed, most seemed to be two- or three-stories, max four-stories. R4D – 120'. What's that all about?!
- We currently have roughly a 40' setback (wild guess here) on Olivia, and voices carry up from the sidewalk – even regular speaking (not shouting) voices. Lesser setbacks would exacerbate the problem.
- Does road width have any bearing on allowed height?
- Will the summary of meeting questions/feedback be available for the public to see?
- The amendments are not simple, therefore, these meetings, while helpful, are not going to clarify everything.
- I would like the illustrations to show specific sites in Ann Arbor and would like double images of what heights look like (i.e. one building at 30' and one at 35', etc).
- Question time was almost enough, but having a closing time does tend to leave some things unanswered. I am glad there are multiple meetings.
- Were there neighborhood reps on those initial committees you mentioned? Planners, Developers, Environmentalists. Were there neighborhood reps??
- *[Regarding the PowerPoint Presentation, question #2 above]:* A few examples missing, such as research and residential.
- You did a very good job!
- I support anything that encourages business and jobs in business districts. I completely agree that large empty lawns are unnecessary and environmentally unfriendly in an office park. However, large front lawns have advantages for residential: 1) privacy, 2) protection from street noise and pollution, 3) light, 4) a place for shade trees. There is a big difference between 15 and 40 feet. Would you want your house 25 feet closer to the sidewalk? I doubt anyone would. I totally oppose maximum setbacks.
- Also, I urge the city to question its backward-looking “vision” to somehow replicate pre-war Ann Arbor. It is 2009. We don't live a pre-war lifestyle, nor could we, even if we wanted to. We are dependent on the automobile. We live in a climate with bad weather half the year. Everyone's life is full, rushed, time-sensitive. We do not want greater density (i.e. congestion), nor do we want businesses with inadequate parking that will constantly turn over. We do not want student housing built by developers who believe students do not own cars. We need a dose of realism here.
- I think you need to be very careful about UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES. Rezoning of S. University was to encourage 6 or 7 story buildings and look at the 25 story plan we got and the City Council was about to approve – well scaled back to only 16. Be very careful about definitions – hotel, new construction, measuring height, counting parking (even if it's not in this plan), hazardous research substances, green space, flood plains. Allow plenty of time for questions and concerns to surface. The group tonight was all pretty knowledgeable already. What will happen when zoning changes in areas where people have not been paying attention? Go with presentation to residences near the red spots on your map and talk to people there. The run through of all the commercial zones was informative, but way too fast to absorb. I hope the photos are on the website.



CITY OF ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

100 North Fifth Avenue, P.O. Box 8647, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107-8647

www.a2gov.org

Administration (734)794-6210

Community Development Services (734) 622-9025

Parks & Recreation Services (734) 794-6230

Planning & Development Services - Building (734) 794-6267

Planning & Development Services - Planning (734) 794-6265

Community Services Area

Meeting Summary

Date: July 23, 2009

Time: 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

Location: Cobblestone Farm, 2781 Packard Rd

Re: Area, Height & Placement—Ward 4 Meeting

Attendees: 20 attendees; City of Ann Arbor—Jeff Kahan, Connie Pulcifer, Andrea Milne (intern)

Part I. Comments and questions from meeting attendees:

1. It would be helpful to have questions throughout the presentation so we don't have to remember until later
2. R4D height is increasing to 120'? Please explain why it is so high.
3. Where are the R4D sites?
4. If buildings are torn down, could they then be rebuilt taller?
5. Is there a "magic" formula for creating regulations? How did you come to these numbers?
6. Are there incentives to switching parking and the building (front to back) and being allowed to build mid-block cut-throughs?
7. Are there limits to what developers can do? What's going to keep developers from encroaching too closely to residential property lines? How do we control the quality of development and how would new standards impact new development?
8. I'm concerned that the multifamily districts will see more demolitions to take advantage of closer setbacks. We have two vacant sites in our neighborhood with parking in the back and a detention pond, so there is no room for green space. There was more green space with two houses; now there's just an oversized home. How do we make sure development is in scale with the neighborhoods in terms of open space?
9. What's keeping zoning districts on the edges from being changed to a new zone with higher density? What will prevent other zoning districts from being rezoned to R4D?

10. The presentation is nice with pictures from around the country, but how will that translate to Ann Arbor? How do we make sure the design doesn't get watered down?
11. There's an assumption that zoning is the same across the city, but each site has different characteristics. Why do they have the same requirements? Some industrial sites should have a 100' buffer all the way around rather than just on one side. Some houses face industrial lots. We seem to be reducing protection for residential areas by decreasing setbacks and increasing height on nearby industrial and research. Remember that research and residential don't always back up to each other. Sometimes they are side by side.
12. There's a concern in my neighborhood about adequate buffering around businesses with late hours abutting residential. What type of buffering is required between uses?
13. Maybe an incentive for developers could be a bonus if they provide a park and ride lot with a bus stop.
14. People need "relief" – with greater density, we need to have open space requirements
15. Developers *are* sniffing around for building opportunities and *will* take advantage of new zoning codes. I'm concerned about them buying up homes and removing them just because they can.
16. When developers aren't sniffing around, the University is. The University is looking to push their boundaries. Please take this into consideration.
17. The pictures are from all over the country, but will we become another Southfield? Increased FAR may result in "Southfield type" development. In Birmingham, parking gets pushed into neighborhoods. Will we lose our parking lots?
18. This will be increasing infrastructure load that will need to be improved. For example, Arborland: there should be a requirement that increasing density should *require* a bus stop location.
19. Regarding the R1E sites where residential is located on research/industrial lots: what happens if the employer leaves? Will the neighborhoods die?
20. I'm concerned that we are making it easier for developers to do projects that neighborhoods don't want, the City Council doesn't want to do, and the Planning Commission doesn't want. Aren't we just making it easier for developers to do the projects that we've been opposed to in the past?
21. Please make contact information available for my ward representative and the advisory committee members. *(Post meeting note from staff: The names of the Advisory Committee members have been added to the AHP web page. To protect personal privacy the City does not post or distribute private email addresses or phone numbers of volunteer boards, commissions or committees. Advisory Committee members can be emailed at planning@a2gov.org or through the AHP project manager, Jeff Kahan at jkahan@a2gov.org.)*
22. This is pretty poor turn out – having meetings during the summer is not the best time to get people to show up.
23. The meeting should be longer to accommodate enough questions

24. I haven't felt that this is a discussion – it's more of a presentation with questions and comments
25. What I feel is lacking is communication/discussion between neighbors
26. We haven't been included in the process
27. We need to have a community-wide facilitated meeting that allows us to talk to each other
28. We feel like you're coming to us with something that is preordained

Part II. Meeting attendees completed feedback forms at the meeting's end. The forms are summarized below:

1. This meeting helped me understand the proposed amendments to the City's Area, Height and Placement standards.
 Strongly Disagree Disagree (2) Neutral (1) Agree (10) Strongly Agree
2. The images in the PowerPoint presentation helped illustrate the proposed amendments.
 Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (1) Neutral (2) Agree (7) Strongly Agree (1)
3. I was given adequate opportunity to ask questions and provide comments at the community meeting.
 Strongly Disagree (4) Disagree (5) Neutral (3) Agree (1) Strongly Agree
4. Any other comments, questions, feedback, or ideas? (Feedback comments are recorded verbatim).
 - Provide incentives for sustainable building design and transit oriented design such as Park & Ride lot areas
 - (Response to Q1): Really these were five meetings, not ward specific. Not specifically about our ward
 - (Response to Q2): California, Kentucky...
 - Allow questions during the presentation. There was NOT enough time allowed for questions.
 - A2 has had numerous "by right" developments that City Council says they HAVE to allow. Why are we allowing developers MORE freedom?
 - I'm glad to hear that there will be height restrictions for things previously labeled as no cap.
 - Don't ruin Ann Arbor's neighborhoods! Why do renters have priority over owners?
 - Have the community-wide meeting in a place that is easy for people to attend and park.

- There has not been appropriate time for feedback. Please follow Marcia's comments to extend discussion.
- (Response to Q2): Warm weather climates do not represent Michigan winters
- (Response to Q3): Not enough time for all questions to be answered
- Summer meetings poorly timed
- It seemed to me that there are plenty of other opportunities (email, going to council meetings) to raise questions. I suppose we might benefit from more talking, but we could also benefit from setting in our own neighborhood meetings, sending in neighborhood reps, etc. Is the prevailing sense that the neighborhoods are feeling railroaded?
- (Response to Q2): You don't need to go so far from home to find examples for your PowerPoint. Seattle is way too far.
- Fiscal impacts and infrastructure costs need to be studied up front.
- I like the idea of requiring transit "furniture" in lieu of parking. The Arborland example is illuminative. "Suffering" the AATA presence should be a requirement, not a volunteer option.
- Health, safety, morals and general welfare as explicit considerations in development decisions. Though, in Ann Arbor, we seem to have given up on morals!
- Many PUD projects shown (over 30 ft ht), show more recent compliant structures per R4C.
- R4C, six person unit, why? Everything else is 4-person.
- Multi-*family* is a misnomer – please define more clearly and/or change terminology. People who reside in a space where they have security locks on their bedroom doors and furnish those rooms with mini refrigerators do NOT a family make in my experience.
- Publicity: Something to explore: Utilize FaceBook, Twitter and other social media (not noted on public notification sheet). (Yes, we're all learning as we go here. I don't "tweet").
- Cut Jeff's slideshow in time. Was promised slideshow = ½ hour. Actual presentation ended at 7:15 PM. If not, let audience ask questions during presentation, please.
- Images seem "idealized" not real world.
- Get some REAL workshops, not just listening sessions. It may take more work, even some money, but it's better to get to design with neighborhoods as partners, rather than end-users. What's the rush? It may take more time, but develop a full meaningful engagement process. Use World Café and other methods.
- Developers are going to take GREAT ADVANTAGE of the R1E zoning. How do we know Council will challenge the developer if the proposed development affects our watersheds negatively? Or will they be afraid of being sued?

- Last meeting should be at least 2 ½ hours to field all questions.
- Does the new zoning law which allows developers to reduce setback require them to provide new open space somewhere else on the site?
- I would like to have been able to ask questions during the presentation. I am concerned about possible amendments (as stated during the meeting) negatively impacting drains and road use – also increased water run-off. The more development in my residential area (zoned multiple family dwelling) the more the basements on my street (Adams) experience flooding during storms. Decreasing setbacks and allowing additional height will increase population density and overburden our parking availability and over used streets that road surface maintenance does not currently keep pace with. Storm and drain sewers also will be negatively impacted. I want to see residential zones protected from these changes. I approve of pedestrian friendly commercial areas.



CITY OF ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

100 North Fifth Avenue, P.O. Box 8647, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107-8647

www.a2gov.org

Administration (734)794-6210

Community Development Services (734) 622-9025

Parks & Recreation Services (734) 794-6230

Planning & Development Services - Building (734) 794-6267

Planning & Development Services - Planning (734) 794-6265

Community Services Area

Meeting Summary

Date: July 30, 2009

Time: 6:30 pm to 9:30 pm

Location: Forsythe Middle School Media Center, 1655 Newport Rd.

Re: Area, Height & Placement—Ward 5 Meeting

Attendees: 33 attendees; City of Ann Arbor—Jeff Kahan, Connie Pulcifer, Andrea Milne (intern)

Part I. Comments and questions from meeting attendees:

1. If you're capping the O, RE, and ORL, what will the cap be?
2. Why can't we make the names of the advisory committee available? (*Post meeting note from staff: The names of the Advisory Committee members have been added to the AHP web page. To protect personal privacy the City does not post or distribute private email addresses or phone numbers of volunteer boards, commissions or committees. Advisory Committee members can be emailed at planning@a2gov.org or through the AHP project manager, Jeff Kahan at jkahan@a2gov.org.)*)
3. What is a setback? Where does it start?
4. I'm not supportive of tall buildings – we need to look at the infrastructure we currently have – we have stormwater problems and we have a lot of vacant buildings and lots, so we have time to work on this (we don't have a lot of people looking for more space right now).
5. I'm concerned that we are focusing too much on area, height and placement and not enough about creating mixed use. This reminds me of Calthorpe process which was a major bait and switch. All the great images were shown and we ended up with the green plastic awnings.
6. We won't get acceptance from neighborhoods until the city stops proposing oversized buildings.
7. There may be a reason to keep front yards – for example, for gardening when we don't have any other food source.
8. I agree with the scale, but want to know the impact this will have on trees.

9. The maps seem deceiving – the zoning districts are represented by dots? The “dots” are surrounded by residential.
10. We've seen a lot of subdividing of lots in my neighborhood, which changes the entire feel. What will happen with the R1E areas? I'm concerned about the Miller/Maple area, which is surrounded by residential lots. The changes to height in this area will really change the character of the neighborhood.
11. What is appropriate outside of a downtown area? I have a concern with the zero-setback lots. There needs to be enough room between the ROW and development to encourage adjacent public and private activity. We need time to consider what “we believe” about our contexts of character (not just staff).
12. Why are we proposing changes to R4C?
13. Transit-oriented developments won't happen in Ann Arbor because there's no money. There's no trust between the city and residents – we don't get to see the emails or know the committee members. You just come and present and not leave time for questions. The process should start with citizens.
14. If we are increasing density, where will the water come from?
15. I like the project and the concept of encouraging non-motorized transportation. People want a more walkable and bikable environment.
16. I am the manager of the 777 building and am excited about these changes. The concern about tall buildings is unfounded. The cost to build a 10-12 story building isn't financially feasible. These regulations will bring jobs to the area – they accommodate underground parking and 4-story buildings, which is an incentive for employers. I suggest increasing the height to 60'-70' in hotel and multifamily areas. Developments need to be large enough to accommodate all employees in the same building. These changes will also encourage non-motorized transportation.
17. How do we keep up with the rolling changes (to the uncapped height limitations)? Will you post any further changes on the web?
18. If someone sees on the map that the changes will affect their lot, is there an appeals process?
19. I have concerns about reduced setbacks at the Summit and Main development. This will create more space for development. How would AHP impact the Near North projects? It sounds like it's making it easier for developers to put in huge buildings. My concern is that a PUD would not be a PUD anymore – it would just be allowed.
20. I would recommend that the definition of the height of a building is the *actual* height, not the mid-pitch height.
21. Thanks for the presentation – it helps a lot. I'm coming from a neighborhood that's surrounded by the red and yellow areas. In general, I agree with what's being said, I share your vision. Please allow people to address the changes affecting their lots, though. I request that new zoning be made to these areas of major change. Changes should be applied site by site.

22. The FAR to 200% is massive and in some of these neighborhoods that would be a huge change.
23. We should start with improving our sidewalk amenities and traffic patterns – not necessarily the AHP.
24. I'm happy to get rid of the huge parking lots in front of strip malls, but I'm concerned about the people working in those buildings – they need open space and trees, not streetscape noises. But it's like we're going from huge lawns to nothing in the RE and ORL areas. Huge lawns are terrible – we need something in between that will preserve the character of the neighborhoods that we like.
25. Garden Homes used to be considered the best planned subdivision because neighbors had all the power. But I'm concerned about the subdivision of lots. The Miller/Maple intersection has vacant lots and a dying strip mall. We don't trust the Planning Department and City Council to take care of this. I'm concerned that too much commercial will be put in here. I do not like the 200% FAR and uncapped heights.
26. I appreciate that you listened to earlier meetings and will cap the previously uncapped heights.
27. With higher density, we will get more people. But in some places, the sidewalks are already full. We need wider sidewalks to accommodate bikes, pedestrians, buses, etc. (Gave an example from Planning Magazine, July 2009).
28. I live South of I-94 and we have never had help from the city to take care of the plume that comes over where I live. There aren't any sidewalks along Ellsworth, and with traffic congestion and potholes, it is very unsafe to walk or bike.
29. The big red area near where I live is very big. If they fill it up with large buildings, that's like making another city.
30. I will write my comments on paper and give it to you and anyone that wants to see them because I feel that these meetings have not been accommodating to discussion. I feel these recommendations will have a large impact on existing neighborhoods.

Part II. Meeting attendees completed feedback forms at the meeting's end. The forms are summarized below:

1. This meeting helped me understand the proposed amendments to the City's Area, Height and Placement standards.
 Strongly Disagree Disagree (1) Neutral (8) Agree (5) Strongly Agree (2)
2. The images in the PowerPoint presentation helped illustrate the proposed amendments.
 Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (2) Neutral (4) Agree (6) Strongly Agree (2)
3. I was given adequate opportunity to ask questions and provide comments at the community meeting.
 Strongly Disagree (4) Disagree (3) Neutral (1) Agree (6) Strongly Agree (2)

4. Any other comments, questions, feedback, or ideas? (Feedback comments are recorded verbatim).
- (Response to #1): It got my feet wet
 - (Response to #2): The illustrations helped as generic examples, but didn't really connect the dots."
 - (Response to #3): Good that you let all speak – but the ambience was not great for a more thoughtful exchange.
 - It's good to have these sessions, but it doesn't feel like the process has any community "digestion" time built into it – this needs to be a more robust and genuine dialogue.
 - I feel that I've heard what the proposals put forth, but I don't feel like I understand what the *implications* are yet.
 - There are some potentially good things in the AHP proposals and some things that are more unknown – it would be really beneficial for more conversations to happen.
 - Go back to the community to see what changes are needed. This should have been the starting point.
 - Slides were not representative of some of the changes in scale the AHP modifications would make possible.
 - Relates to #1: Make changes to the AHP, *then* have another series of citizen meetings, *then* make changes, *then*... This could take a while – it should.
 - State and Eisenhower should be the site of "New Town". The release of these parcels from stupid setbacks is the place to start. I am *strongly* supportive of mixed use, including residential in this area IF the streetscapes are at human/pedestrian friendly scale.
 - Not enough time for answers or questions. No time for discussion. Staff aggregation of comments institutes a "filter" of frequent *staff* use of "We believe..." It's most important to know what we, the public believe. Also, I noticed the notes on my comments taken at this meeting were unrecognizable to *me* as my own comments! We also need design guidelines that address context and honor contexts of character. A new R1E should be addressed under a proposal for new zoning!
 - (Response to #2): One problem with the illustrations is they usually do not show the full extent of the site... a shortcoming of photos. Maybe overview site plans would be helpful. Too bad the illustrations get people side-tracked!
 - I suggest that the environmental issues be further highlighted... that in reality is the driving force for making changes.
 - Reduce vehicle miles traveled
 - Reduce urban sprawl; retain "sense of place"
 - Increase ability to use mass transit – the point of buildings at the rear hurts bus users was very good, but needs to be further emphasized.

- Might want to note that these zoning standards are from the 1960's! And that the world has changed; we now know more about planning/development issues that affect our lives and town.
- The images from Seattle and Ca. not very helpful
- Increasing maximum hotel height from 40-120 ft seems excessive – a striking density increase. Encouraging businesses to come to Ann Arbor by liberalizing building limits does not seem to me a way to manage a community.
- I agree with the lady who proposed an open discussion. Two-way exchanges are not enough.
- What is *proposed* is often undercut by 'deals', 'accommodations', and 'special permissions' over which we have no knowledge of control. So often developers break promises, assurances and contracts and the City is unwilling to pursue the perpetrators. Examples: The 'Olgas' on State St., Lower Town has been demolished with no buildings in site, the YMCA fiasco. There's plenty of conflict-of-interest on the Council and Planning Commission. We have no confidence in the integrity of our city government with a few exceptions. We oppose high-rise and large structures replacing modest structures, often of historical, social and cultural significance. I heard a well-known developer say on Lucy Ann Lance's radio program that any 'old' structure on E. Liberty has outlived its usefulness. Vulture, indeed.
- These meetings don't seem to guarantee that citizens' concerns will be addressed. These meetings seem to make us feel good and let us vent.
- Jeff Kahan's slideshow presentation began: 6:55 PM, end: 7:50 PM. The tone of this meeting was about what citizens could not do to participate, not what they could say or do. Posted meeting closure: 8:00 PM. This is a terrible way to build rapport and facilitate, especially after citizens specifically requested a greater give and take during prior 'workshops' – itself a misnomer. Appreciate expanded schedule, but it was likely a chilling factor.
- (Response to #2): It would be helpful to have labels with locations of examples. It would be helpful if Jeff knew setbacks for slides and zoning districts for A2 slides.
- Evaluation should include info about agree or oppose changes to gauge citizen reaction.
- Thanks for the invite to the advisory meeting. I'll look for the info on-line.
- It would be helpful if you could explain more about the change from 'no cap' to an actual number. If you want public comment, we need to have more info.
- The Chronicle said Marcia said more time might be necessary. I strongly agree!
- Another person made an *excellent* point: height definition should be actual *height* of building.
- You keep mentioning blogs. I only value blogs where people use their names.
- All extreme developments will be 'by right' with the new standards.

- My understanding is businesses already gave input. 777 rep lectured us. Does she live here – A2?
- *Please* follow up on comment about Indianapolis. Strong facilitative conversation. Connie said she will bring it forward to the advisory committee.
- Need more explanations/illustrations/*repetition* of definition re: C and R and all the numbers (C4, etc). Confused layperson!
- Aesthetics! Neighborhood character and scale. Preserve ‘em! Find a way!
- (Response to #3): Improved over last, but still needs improvement.
- Your ‘Feedback Form’ only asks our opinions of your presentation – *not* our opinions of the changes you are trying to impose on our city and neighborhoods.
- Developers are *already* given preference over citizens. I do not favor giving them more control over our city.
- Cities used in examples do not have winter weather comparable to Michigan. In the winter there is often several inches of slush and ice in the bike lanes.
- Specific caps on building heights should have been available, instead of just telling us there will be caps reinstated on O, RE, ORL, C3. How will we learn this detail? No stealth action, please.
- (Response to #2): I felt that some of the slides were misleading and disingenuous. I think most A2 residents would welcome development similar to that shown in many of the examples, but the changes to zoning proposed do not ensure the type of development (e.g. pedestrian islands, trees, landscaping, 3-story building heights for zero setbacks. Instead, the proposed changes have enough loopholes to lead to urban ugliness.
- I am very concerned about lack of protection for neighborhoods. Some zoning ‘districts’ are single lots or are surrounded by residences. Some proposed zoning changes could allow building heights and setbacks that are completely out of character and/or dwarf neighbors.
- Too many statements of ‘I/We believe” that something will happen. In policy, you don’t leave things up to belief, rather need to set the rules and regs to ensure that things *will* happen.
- Will trees survive in this new dense urban environment?
- Some of the proposed changes are likely to improve urban development. However, the changes lack protection of neighborhoods. Neighborhoods need *transition* zones, especially for tall buildings.
- I like getting rid of the large parking lots in front of stores set way off the street. I also like reducing setbacks for research zoning.
- I heartily agree that what A2 residents want are not being addressed by the AHP changes – let’s start with walkability (sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, pedestrian refuge islands), real bike riding improvements (wide bike lanes, off road bike paths), reducing road widths, etc.

- (Response to #3): Stated time was up with 20 min – extended to later.
- Before more urbanism, we need to deal with SW, drinking water and Sewer issues facing A2.
- Need to include porous pavement in rec's to reduce SW flows, decrease heat island, detoxify SW; green roofs should also be required.
- Need to propose *real*/ usable open space including a greenway in Allen's Creek.
- Need to cap heights at current levels.
- Need more time to act on this. With the current economic environment, we have time and lots of empty space in town.
- I think many of the residents in Ann Arbor forget the benefits of attracting businesses to Ann Arbor – the increase in tax dollars that will be received. The City of Ann Arbor has many requirements in place to protect our environment and maintain the quality of the land. Many of us that own commercial properties have our own environmental initiatives (ie. LEED certification, expanded recycling), and have budgets to maintain.
- (Response to #1, 2, & 3): Not enough time to go in depth.
- I am supportive of the general thrust of these decisions. I would recommend separate discussions on the R, C, RE, etc changes vs. the purely residential.
- The question of islands that are highly impacted is important – such as the 'red' island at Maple/Miller and the residential 'white' island on Plymouth.
- If by 'conversation,' residents mean serial monologues, I'm not interested.



CITY OF ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

100 North Fifth Avenue, P.O. Box 8647, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107-8647

www.a2gov.org

Administration (734)794-6210

Community Development Services (734) 622-9025

Parks & Recreation Services (734) 794-6230

Planning & Development Services - Building (734) 794-6267

Planning & Development Services - Planning (734) 794-6265

Community Services Area

Summary of Comments

Date: Compiled on August 3, 2009

The comments in this document followed an article titled "[Zoning 101: Area, Height, Placement](#)" published in *The Ann Arbor Chronicle* on July 26, 2009. These have been included in the summary of comments as the staff team believes they represent a relevant and emerging type of forum for engaging citizens and exchanging ideas. The comments have been reprinted with permission from the publisher of *The Ann Arbor Chronicle*.

1. By Dan Ezekiel
July 27, 2009 at 8:43 am

An extremely well-written and helpful summary of the issue and the discussion at the meeting. Thanks, Dave!

2. By Bob Martel
July 27, 2009 at 10:51 am

Dave, I agree with Dan, an excellent article that clearly lays out the issues surrounding this subject. As a member of the AHP Advisory Committee, I appreciate your effort to set the table for the community discussion. The role of the Advisory Committee, by the way, was not to help in formulating the proposal itself but rather to advise the City on the best way to present this to the community and to gather feedback. In recognition of the concerns raised in the article about the process, I have full confidence in City Staff's commitment to adjust the feedback process going forward to make sure that all opinions are heard.

I was placed on the committee as a representative of the developer community (boos and hisses hereby acknowledged!) For what it's worth, I personally support the majority of the elements of this proposal. If implemented, we will not see immediate changes in the landscape as most of the parcels affected are already developed and those that are not will be impacted for years to come by the reality of economic conditions. But rather, we will see a gradual and natural phasing of new developments over the next fifty or so years in this direction. The end result for those of us who live long enough to see it, will be a more pedestrian and mass-transit friendly environment in the non-downtown commercial (e.g., retail and multi-use) developments that will be completed in the future.

3. By Chuck Warpehoski
July 27, 2009 at 10:56 am

Great article! I think the AHP process is moving in the right direction, and I'm glad to see this kind of forum for fine-tuning the proposal. I plan to be at the Thursday presentation.

4. By Jack Eaton
July 27, 2009 at 1:18 pm

The Area, Height and Placement proposals are based in "New Urbanism" theory. Much of that is based on the premise that if you build cities densely, it will prevent urban sprawl. There is no example of the introduction of new urbanism principles in a midwest town like Ann Arbor making a measurable reduction in reliance on automobile use.

The planning staff talks about encouraging "transit-friendly" development. In fact what is needed is development-friendly transit. Ann Arbor does not have transit service that can reasonably displace automobile use. Buses are scheduled with 30 or 60 minute intervals. Reliable transit requires service every 10 minutes or less. Further, Ann Arbor transit service is based on a "spoke" system, where buses originate downtown, follow routes that radiate from downtown and meander in loops at the edges of town and return downtown. To travel from one destination to another on the edge of town (for example from Maple and Stadium to Packard and Stadium) one must go downtown, change buses and then travel back out to the destination.

The recently approved transportation plan does not address improved perimeter routing or scheduling frequency. That plan does call for train service to outlying areas. Thus, the transportation plan provides further encouragement for urban sprawl without seeking improved service inside the city.

The idea that tall, densely situated development will curb urban sprawl is a silly idea. No one moves to Scio Township, Chelsea, Saline or Brighton because there were not enough high-rise developments in Ann Arbor. Nothing about luxury condos in town will satisfy the desire for a half acre lawn outside the city. Dense development appeals to a different demographic than suburban sub-developments do.

On the other hand, the Area, Height and Placement proposals will impact residential neighborhoods throughout the city. The corner store can be replaced by a 50 foot tall multi-use building that towers over neighboring homes. Taller apartment or condominium buildings with parking underneath will allow for more buildings on a site because the minimum open space requirement is unchanged but the under-building parking frees up new space.

Every contentious project in town has been opposed because it was too extreme for the surrounding neighborhood. Each has been approved because the Council believes it has no authority to reject a "by-right" project. The Area, Height and Placement proposal would simply allow more extreme projects to fit within the so-called "by-right" designation. Is that really what we want?

Jack Eaton
South Maple Neighborhood Group

5. By Dave Askins
July 27, 2009 at 1:35 pm

Re: [2] "The planning staff talks about encouraging "transit-friendly" development. In fact what is needed is development-friendly transit. Ann Arbor does not have transit service the can reasonably displace automobile use."

This relates to a theme that Jim Mogensen often raises in various contexts during public commentary — mostly at AATA board meetings, but sometimes also at city council meeting: commuter-oriented transit versus locally-oriented transit. Otherwise put, there's transit that's designed for people to get to their jobs (who live somewhere else), but there's also transit that's designed for people who live round these parts to get around town.

Much of the recent focus on transit development (WALLY, east-west rail, park-and-ride) has been centered on commuter transit, as opposed to local transit.

6. By Julie
July 27, 2009 at 1:52 pm

Jack, great post. I could not agree more. Especially re AATA. The bus comes near my house every 30 min at peak times, and every HOUR at non-peak times. How can I use the bus? If I miss it, I wait an HOUR? If a bus came to my street every 15 minutes, my car would rarely leave the driveway. And I also agree about the massive scale of projects proposed for neighborhoods. If this is what the re-zoning will encourage, I can't understand why we're even talking about it.

7. By Bob Martel
July 27, 2009 at 3:07 pm

With respect to mass transit, we all need to be realistic. Ann Arbor is not, and never will be, Manhattan or the Loop area in Chicago. The density required to support effective mass transit for cross-town trips is not likely going to be achieved in Ann Arbor in the lifetime of anyone currently alive (and thank goodness for that!) Therefore, unless someone develops some as of yet unknown technology, mass transit is not going to be much help for cross-town trips unless one's trip coincides with an existing bus route, or is on a very limited budget and/or has a lot of time. For most of us who can afford it, personal transportation in some form or another is going to be the mainstay for the foreseeable future. This might take the form of electric cars or scooters rather than gas powered cars which could be a good thing.

8. By Vivienne Armentrout
July 27, 2009 at 3:07 pm

Dave, thank you for making the point about the AATA focus. The board has specifically set a goal of enhancing commuter access to Ann Arbor and I believe that this is at the cost of enhancing local transit. Further, last summer the AATA board set a goal of becoming a “regional” authority.

I believe that many of us would use the bus a great deal more with improvement of scheduling. My route does not run on weekends or evenings, and very nearly had the service during the day canceled. I’m grateful that we do still have that daytime service.

9. By Sabra Briere

July 27, 2009 at 3:56 pm

It’s not easy to write any sort of primer for the Area, Height and Placement zoning changes. I am so grateful to the Chronicle for covering this penultimate meeting, and for dealing with a complex issue so well.

I’ve asked that those on my mailing list take the time to read this article, and then ask me questions. Zoning has been the focus of so much of Council’s attention in the past few years. This piece of the puzzle is nearly ready for Council to look at again, and I want to be certain we in the City understand the impact it will have.

Thank you for providing this very thorough coverage. It IS like being there.

10. By Jack Eaton

July 27, 2009 at 4:43 pm

In my haste this morning to respond to the content of the meeting, I forgot to say what a pleasure it is to have the Chronicle report at length about such meetings. It is great to have such comprehensive reporting about these meetings.

The City planning staff has an Area, Height and Placement project web page that includes the proposed zoning amendments, a good summary of the height and placement changes and a video of the first presentation of this slide show. The slide show is pretty much the same each time. [Here’s the link.](#)

As mentioned in the article, the final neighborhood meeting is Thursday July 30 from 6:30 to 8 p.m., at Forsythe Middle School Media Center, 1655 Newport Rd. Planning staff promises to have a final city-wide meeting in the near future. Anyone can attend any of the neighborhood meetings.

11. By Murph.

July 28, 2009 at 3:34 am

@Jack Eaton:

It’s quite reasonable for you to opine that various development proposals have been “too extreme” for their neighborhoods - and I’d certainly agree in some cases - but I think that a lot of what you write up to that point is either not quite accurate or else just not related to

that point. If what you mean is just that you think particular developments are too extreme, and that the proposed zoning amendments would allow more such “extreme” plans, focus on that - it’s a perfectly valid sentiment. Meanwhile, I’ll respond to some of your unrelated points:

You write that “much of [New Urbanism] is based on the premise that if you build cities densely, it will prevent urban sprawl.” I think you’re over-emphasizing one piece of the puzzle. The primary premise of New Urbanism is that it creates better places to live. Reducing sprawl is in some ways just a side benefit to the “better places” goal - but it’s more significantly a *cause* of the “better places”. By putting the coffee shop four blocks from your house, rather than having to get in the car and drive to Arborland Starbucks, the hope is to make better neighborhoods by reducing sprawl - bringing the cafe to you. If we happen to reduce the number of strip mall Starbucks in the process - reducing sprawl - bonus points. I won’t get into the number of institutional barriers (regulatory and financial) that drive suburban sprawl, except to note that we’ve spent 60 years building up momentum on suburbanizing - if we’re to reverse that, it’s not going to happen in a few years. I’m hardly a card-carrying New Urbanist, but you certainly can’t write off the ideas because they’ve not yet produced a sprawl-free city.

You note that “Ann Arbor does not have transit service the can reasonably displace automobile use,” and I’d agree - but note that the transportation and land use components need to be addressed simultaneously, as a single system. Mass transit cannot function without a critical mass of users, and a critical mass of destinations. Service levels and user/destination supply need to be addressed in tandem - else you get either wasted service or congestion. Even if AATA could afford to double their service hours (running buses twice as frequently), gaining some ridership from the added convenience, it wouldn’t be a panacea. I referred above to bringing the cafe to you, and that applies here as well - you still need the critical mass of destinations to make transit work. A five minute bus ride to the grocery store is perfectly doable (trust me), but a 20 minute bus ride, with a dozen intermediate stops, because the grocery store is way over there, is a problem no matter how frequent the service. (Note that I’m not using the word “density” in the above because it’s not the point - the point is putting people where they need and want to be, and “critical mass” is a better word for it. Or “accessibility”.)

You further note that, “Nothing about luxury condos in town will satisfy the desire for a half acre lawn outside the city.” You’re right - it would be pretty silly if we built nothing but downtown condos and expected everyone to be happy living in them. On the other hand, nothing about a half-acre lawn will satisfy the desire for a downtown condo, or a near-downtown townhome, or a small house on a small lot in walking distance to downtown.

Do not mistake the prevalence of large lot suburbanism for a preference for large lot suburbanism - various research has shown that many more people are stuck in suburban homes for lack of more pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods than vice versa. (see, e.g., Levine, Jonathan, Aseem Inam and Gwo-Wei Torng. (2005) A Choice-Based Rationale for Land-Use and Transportation Alternatives: Evidence from Boston and Atlanta. Journal of

Planning Education and Research 24(3):317-330.) Certainly, anybody who wants a home on a quarter- to half-acre lot in a new auto-dependent subdivision can find any number of choices in the area, at any price range. The supply of housing in neighborhoods with good transit service and lots of amenities within walking distance is woefully smaller.

12. By Nancy Shore

July 28, 2009 at 8:56 pm

Thanks again, Dave for a wonderful article and thanks to all for the great comments.

A couple thoughts here. First of all, I personally met and chatted with Jeff Kahan about the AHP plan and to me it sounds very promising.

Think about this . . . there are office buildings in Ann Arbor (like by Briarwood, on State Street and Eisenhower and around Plymouth) that are surrounded by lawn and other offices. Many of these lawns are treated with chemicals so they are weed-free, which can harm the environment, and many of the lawns are mowed by mowers that spew exhaust. Most of the people that work in these office parks have to drive there because they are in a circuitous area surrounded by roads and grass. There is no other real choice. And to top it off, if the person wanted to walk to a coffee shop or a place to grab some lunch, they either have to deal with limited options in the form of a cafeteria, or they have to get in their car to drive to a place to eat.

This is a challenge with some of the current zoning. Because of this zoning, these office parks exist. So what's the alternative? Imagine an office park where you can actually use more of the land to put in some apartments, or a coffee shop, or a restaurant. Now that office worker who had to drive to work can live next door, grab a coffee on the way to work, and then stop at the local bar on the way home. Some of the point of the AHP proposal is to allow for these mixed uses so we don't just have these big office buildings surrounded by nothing but a sea of grass and parking. That was the old model.

Now I do agree that some of the development issues become more complex when you get closer to residential areas (like Stadium and Packard or even by Westgate, where I live). But there are also many places in Ann Arbor that could be vastly improved by allowing for some more development that creates a walkable space by using existing land that is just sitting there because of the zoning. Who knows, maybe if there were some residential units in some of these areas, some of that former lawn could be used for an urban garden? There are a lot of positive possibilities to consider.

I appreciate people's concerns about these issues. I would also encourage you to get to know some of the people behind these plans. Both Jeff Kahan and Connie Pulcifer live in Ann Arbor and are very interested in keeping Ann Arbor a very walkable community. They are not shills for developers and in fact are very progressive in their views about development and urban planning.

One last thing . . . on the transit issue. I agree that our service could be much better, but we do have to understand the context we are in. We are in a state with decreasing revenues

that makes it hard to get money for transit. We are in a state that does not allow for transit funding in a way other states can. And yes, we still lack the true critical mass in some areas to support the kind of transit we want. But it doesn't have to be that way. We can shape this community for the better. I think the AHP plan can help.

13. By Julie

July 30, 2009 at 8:35 am

I'm relatively new to this community and entirely new to discussions of zoning. From my perspective, what this discussion lacks is a kind of strategic plan, an overriding vision of what we want our community to be. I think we need to articulate that vision first and then work to establish codes that serve the vision.

Ann Arbor is a healthy, thriving community that is highly desirable to developers. That desirability puts community members in a position to expect more from developers. There's no reason why Ann Arbor can't be transit-friendly, reasonably dense, family-friendly, and beautiful to boot. I think many of us have been disappointed by recent developments. I'm interested to attend a forum on these topics, but I'm also interested in seeing strong city leadership on this issue to prevent future disappointments.

14. By john

July 30, 2009 at 4:10 pm

great post, murph.

15. By Julie

July 30, 2009 at 7:45 pm

Hey, we have two Julie's here now! Hi other Julie. Shall we distinguish ourselves with last initials, or some other way?

16. By Murph

July 30, 2009 at 8:56 pm

@Julie 13: Good observation on vision.

For my part, I can look at the proposed zoning changes and think, "Fewer strip malls, more places that feel like village centers along important nodes and corridors around town - yeah, I can get behind that!" (But that's because I've spent enough time poring over zoning ordinances to grok the picture.) And I also think that's the loose vision that I've heard from all sorts of people around Ann Arbor over the ~8 years that I've been involved in the discussion. But that's not something that's necessarily transparent in this summary.

I haven't been to any of the meetings on this - but I've seen the project summarized more like that in previous coverage. I actually think the Chronicle is so thorough in the background foundations of zoning here that they've skipped over the part where, "We want to transform car-commerce strips into neighborhood centers."

So, I'd say there is some vision around this, but it may not be as explicit as it could/should be.

17. By Chuck Warpehoski
July 31, 2009 at 10:52 am

I was at last night's 5th ward meeting, here are my thoughts:

1. I am totally behind the idea of "let's make sure that new commercial, light industrial, and research development is not these sprawling, pedestrian-and-transit hostile, strip-mall-type developments;

2. There are areas where the revised zoning changes may require a look at if we should re-zone the area. In particular, there is a pocket of red "Zoning Districts Affected by Major AHP changes" in the middle of a residential area at Maple and Miller that has residents concerned. There is also a pocket of what I believe is residential areas on Plymouth that is surrounded by these highly-affected areas. I haven't gone over the maps and neighborhood characters enough to have a firm opinion about them, except to say that they deserve a look.

3. I think this process may be trying to do too much at once. I think it would be easier to separate out the proposed minor changes to the residential zoning from the moderate and major changes to commercial, research, and industrial zoning. It may be hard to get this all approved in one package.

4. There is significant mistrust by some community members of this process. I heard a lot of table talk along the lines of, "they are out to screw us." I am not going to assign ill intent to the staff and volunteers who worked on this, and I think it's a good direction to move, but this mistrust will make their process much more difficult.

5. Related to the mis-trust, there is an activated group of people who are fighting some projects around the city who are using this existing mobilizing base to come out to critique these proposed changes. There has not been any similar organization of pro-mixed use, anti-strip mall residents to support changes like this. My point here is that the vocal commentary on these proposals may not represent the full range of community thought. That's fine. That's democracy. Those who show up get to be heard. You just need to know what you're getting in to.

6. I think some of the opposition to these changes comes from people concerned that it will threaten their nice neighborhoods. That's understandable. What I like about this is that creates an alternative to all these ugly strip malls, and things like the maximum setback requirements force developers to stop burying their stores behind a sea of asphalt.

18. By John Floyd
July 31, 2009 at 2:05 pm

@ Julie 13

A year ago, after the primary election, the Ann Arbor News reported that Mayor Hieftje had spoken at the majority/machine election night party, to the effect that " We have elected here five candidates who share a Big Picture vision of the future of Ann Arbor. They have the will to implement it".

Neither the mayor, nor any of The Five, have ever been willing to tell the public what that vision, that "It", is. A few weeks ago, at Public Comment time at a council meeting, I repeated my year-old request for the mayor or council to tell us what "it" is. David Askins asked the mayor, the mayor was unwilling to tell him, and claimed that council had no vision (suggesting, to me anyway, that they now claim they are just making things up as they go, merely lurching reactively from one crisis to another, with no vision at all). Why don't you try the mayor or your councilmen, perhaps one will respond to you.

- John

19. By John Floyd

July 31, 2009 at 3:00 pm

Mr. Warpehoski,

Some people have, in addition to policy differences with the current political class, differences over how our various public processes - not merely zoning processes - are implemented by this political class. Differences - even arguments - over policy are the stuff of democracy, and of politics, and are wholly legitimate. When discussions are in public, are complete, include how proposed change fits into an over-riding end vision for the city, let the public know WHAT that vision is, and take place at the BEGINNING of change processes, the community has a greater sense of trust in its officials, regardless of the policy outcome. When discussion appears to have gone on long before issues are brought to the public, when public hearings are scheduled at the END of a process, and when public officials behave as if public hearings are merely pro-forma and perfunctory (e.g. by e-mailing each other during them, not looking at speakers, offering non-responsive "responses", treating speakers with contempt, etc.), government officials invite suspicion of their motives, words, and actions. Perversely, much of our current public process, and political words and actions by council, seem as if intended to maximize public distrust of public officials. It is indeed sad to begin any discussion from the premise that nothing said by the 9-out-of-11 council majority, and those the city employs, can be taken at face value. That, however, is the corner into which this government has painted itself for many people. When credibility is gone, there really is no place for discussion to go, and the community is fractured. There might be parts of various zoning and "density" proposals to which many of the disillusioned might agree - but for the mistrust that this government has invited upon itself. Process matters, and its foundation is trust. "Density" is but one of the arenas in which trust of this government has eroded

20. By John Floyd

July 31, 2009 at 3:13 pm

Ms. Shore,

Few people would object to your suggestion of building high rises at State and Eisenhower, or Briarwood. Westgate and Maple Village malls could withstand at least mid-rises if done with some aplomb, as could Plymouth near US 23. Additionally, removing more of the student population to North Campus would restore much of the arts-and-crafts and late-Victorian to their original purpose: small homes on small lots, walking distance from downtown, for permanent residents to own. As you walk these neighborhoods, you can identify the structures that were built as neighborhood retail, and have since, in many cases, been converted to homes. They could be returned to their original purpose. We already have “new” urbanism here - it just needs to be recognized and, in some cases, restored.

21. By Vivienne Armentrout
July 31, 2009 at 3:36 pm

I was at the Fifth Ward meeting too, and Chuck Warpehoski’s comments are a fair reflection of some of what was said. I’m writing carefully because the planners who presented the material said that they were going to take comments on the Chronicle into account as public comment. I also plan to write up my own summary for my blog. But one thing that came out in comments was that many people simply do not trust the intent or the execution of these numerous planning ventures that the city government is undertaking in a great rush. As was said in different ways by different people, the fact that neighborhoods are having out-of-scale developments thrust down their throats makes many of us suspicious of expansive redefinition of zoning classifications. Most of them amount to much larger buildings on the same parcels (one set includes no cap on building height, which the planners said was being rethought, but without any real commitment). Maybe what the mayor meant was people committed to the “Big (Building) Picture”.

Another issue raised is the concern about the possible effects on adjacent properties. There are, as C.W. mentioned, some specific areas where these redefined zoning classifications could have a significant, as yet unknown, impact on adjacent parcels and a mechanism for anticipating and softening that was not identified.

I also agree with C.W.’s observation that these are a combination of very small fixes (easy to do) and very large changes (need some careful thinking through), and perhaps wrapping them up together will make an ungainly package.

22. By Jack Eaton
July 31, 2009 at 4:33 pm

@Murph

I’m glad that you concede that some recent site plans have been to extreme. It would be hard to argue that City Place, 601 Forrest or 42 North were beneficial additions to the City or their respective neighborhoods. I, however, disagree that I’ve engaged in inaccurate or unrelated discussions. The new urbanism discussion relates to the excuses the planning staff asserts for the proposed zoning changes. The transit discussion relates to the staff’s

preposterous claim that dense development will cause better transit service. The willingness of suburban populations to forgo palatial homes with vast lawns for high-rises is germane and is different in a small mid-western town than in Atlanta or Boston. So, not only do I think that the proposed changes would allow more extreme development, but I also believe that the rationale asserted by staff to support the changes is wrong.

I admit that, unlike you, I am not a professional urban planner. Thus, when I speak of the New Urbanism, it is in the context of how the Ann Arbor planning staff is using the term to support the proposed zoning changes, not how those theories are discussed in textbooks. Our planning department has offered the Area, Height and Placement proposal as new urbanist, even though the proposal does not address quality. The AHP proposals contain quantitative changes, not qualitative changes. Like you, I have actually read the AHP proposal. I have also attended all six meetings where the plan was explained. The changes in that proposal increase size, decrease setbacks and increase commercial FAR. Not a word in the changes address any aspect that would improve the quality of the developments built under the new zoning specifications. We will end up with more, not with better.

It is quite a leap in logic to presume that increased urban density will end or even curtail sprawl. If we want better places, we need to mandate better places, not taller, denser places. For example, replacing chemo-lawns with more buildings is not necessarily an environmental improvement. To effectuate an improvement, we should offer incentives to commercial property owners to replace chemo-lawns with natural plants.

You seem to imply that if the City allows someone to build a coffee shop within walking distance of my neighborhood, it will cause the demise of strip malls. There is nothing in the proposed zoning changes that will bring about the end of strip malls. Strip malls would just be built taller, with other uses above the Starbucks.

If the current plan were approved, the little shopping center at Stadium Boulevard and Packard Road could be replaced by a 50 foot tall multi-use building with reduced setbacks from the streets. Thus, the nearby homes would have an over sized structure that is not technically a strip mall but would have street level shops and a few floors of other uses towering over homes. The new development would likely have a well-lit parking lot behind the building adjacent to homes. Again, the changes in the AHP proposal address quantity, not quality.

It seems like the academic theories of urban density should be applied to urban areas, like Detroit, Chicago, Atlanta or Boston rather than a mature, small mid-west town like Ann Arbor. Ann Arbor really is not an urban setting. We should not bear the brunt of experimental, unproven theories.

The Planning staff presents simultaneous, conflicting arguments about the impact of the proposed changes. On the one hand, staff asserts that the adoption of density will lead to a reduction in automobile use and improve the city. Separately, and in contradiction to the first assertion, staff argues that citizens need not worry that the zoning will lead to widespread removal of existing development to make way for denser development. Density can only

have an impact if widely implemented. So either the proposal will not affect automobile use or it will cause widespread replacement of existing buildings. If it is not widely applied and will not have much impact, then it is unnecessary.

New Urbanism is an untested theory of urban planners. I am sure that the ideas are full of good intent. But, let's remember that the Cabrini Green type of development was an experiment in well-meaning urban planning. Those projects demonstrate what happens when urban planning fails. Experimenting with high-minded theories is risky.

After conceding that Ann Arbor does not have good transit service, you argue that we need to simultaneously address land use and transit planning. Too late. The City just approved a 20 year transportation plan that did not include any improvement to transit service (such as a grid route system or more frequent service). Instead, the plan is to spend a lot of money on train systems to serve the existing and growing sprawl. After tax payers subsidize the building of those train services, we will have to spend huge sums on operational subsidies because all public transit requires huge subsidies. Those expenditures will compete with bus operation subsidies for ever diminishing transportation dollars. Instead of concurrently planning density and improved transit, the city has a transportation plan that undermines transit improvement while pushing for density as if transit will spontaneously appear when enough people need it.

Whether we achieve that critical mass of transit-ready residents is less important than the existence of operational subsidies. Last year, cities throughout the country experienced rapid growth in transit ridership but could not expand service because there is no money for operational expenses. Our state transit funding comes from the transportation fund (as does road building and other projects) which comes from a tax on gas. With a diminishing population and ever more efficient cars, that gas tax generates significantly less funding each year. In the next couple years, the transit portion of the transportation fund will be too little to satisfy the federal requirement for local matching funds. There will be nothing available to improve transit.

Contrary to your claim, a five minute ride to the grocery store is not doable. In my neighborhood, there are a variety of grocery stores within a mile or a mile and a half. To get from my neighborhood to any of these stores requires riding a bus downtown, changing buses and riding that bus back out to the store. My neighborhood has the density to support bus service to and from nearby shopping centers, but lacks transit service. Adding to the height or reducing the setback to developments in our area will not address the fundamentally poor transit service we have.

Academic studies about large urban areas are not a good reason for changing the zoning code in a small town. I know it's not an academic study, but I don't know anyone living in a palatial home in Scio Township who feel they are stuck living there because they cannot find a pedestrian friendly neighborhood. People move out of Ann Arbor for a variety of reasons - high taxes; unresponsive politicians; newer homes - but not for lack of pedestrian friendly neighborhoods. Ann Arbor is not Boston, Atlanta, Chicago or New York. It is a mid-western town that is nearly fully developed. Increasing permissible building height, commercial FAR

and reducing setback is not going to make established neighborhoods into something better than they are now. As mentioned before, good transit service doesn't just happen. It requires significant public subsidies. Density does not provide that funding.

The desire to dramatically increase development within the city also fails to acknowledge the infrastructure problems that come with increased density and population growth. What will they drink? We have had to close drinking supply wells because of the Pall pollution plume. We have little extra capacity. Can our sewer system and watershed system handle growth? Those systems are near capacity. Additional density is not an appropriate response to infrastructure that is near capacity.

In short, the AHP proposals do nothing to address the quality of new developments. While city residents complain that the current regulations allow site plans that have negative impact on existing neighborhoods, the proposed changes merely allow more, not better. Quantity will not lead to quality.

23. By carrie mayfield

July 31, 2009 at 5:25 pm

Please, remember what happened in the Garden Homes subdivision, not two, not three, but FOUR houses put on a lot originally intended for one, maybe two houses! Go on down Fulmer St, halfway on the left, they (the developer) even made his own little "street"! My question, what happened to the original neighborhood plan? Now they are buying the houses with large yards and putting another house on the lot! (drive further down Fulmer, its on the right, by the path, 2 of them!) And you wonder where is the trust? The council listened to public input(against) then said OK, DO IT! I went to the meetings, I was there!

24. By carrie mayfield

July 31, 2009 at 5:31 pm

People, you better pay attention, or you will be living next door to a mega gas station, or a business that was shuttered years ago awaiting to be re-opened. Does anyone Know what is going in the old Shell station at Maple & Miller? Or who Owns it? I moved six yrs ago & it is still being "worked on" Maybe they are waiting for the zoning change.....

25. By Nancy Shore

August 1, 2009 at 10:19 am

As I read through the comments I seem to see some places where many of us can agree.

I think we can agree that Ann Arbor is a great place to live with many neighborhoods that have a wonderful walkable character.

I think we can agree that as of late there have been several proposed developments that have damaged the trust of the public in a public process of determining what we want our community to look like.

And I think we can agree that while there are parts of Ann Arbor that are beautiful and walkable, there are also some parts of Ann Arbor that resemble strip malls and ghettos of office parks.

It is my hope that some of the ordinance changes will help transform some of the areas that are now less desirable into ones that are more desirable.

But I think where the challenge is that the ordinance changes can only go so far. Can the City really dictate exactly the types of buildings that should be put up on a particular area? How does public enterprise fit into this picture? When people talk about a vision, I do think it's important for the City government to be involved in this vision, but it also seems to make sense to bring in developers and people with private interests who are actually going to be building these buildings.

It is my hope through all of this that we can find some common ground and get away from some of the visceral reactions that people are having to either no-development or large developments.

Can we agree that we'd like to see Ann Arbor continue to thrive? And can we agree that there are some places in Ann Arbor that could become more walkable, like some of the retail-only and office-only areas? If so, perhaps we can focus on those areas and make sure to have a lot of sensitivity when any of these areas are close to established residential neighborhoods.

As the University continues to grow and as we continue (hopefully) to attract employers to the area, I hope we can find ways to increase the amount of walkable housing in our community so that many of these employees can live in Ann Arbor and contribute to its vibrancy. I hope this is something we can get behind.

26. By Chuck Warpehoski

August 1, 2009 at 1:39 pm

Great discussion! Thank you Chronicle for providing a venue for it!

Let me chime in again:

1. As I've followed discussions about development in Ann Arbor, I've "The option of urbanism: investing in a new American dream" by UM Professor Christopher B. Leinberger to be very helpful. Leinberger's book explores:

* The transition from the 40s and 50s-era walkable/transit focused development to the 70s and 80s-era car-focused, suburbs and strip malls model of development, and the positives and negatives of that change for society;

* How the S&L bailout of the 1980s brought Wall Street into the real estate market and how that's contributed to the homogenization of development; and

* How demographic changes are leading up to pent-up demand for "walkable urbanism," and which may mean we've already overbuilt drivable suburban developments.

The Ann Arbor Library has a copy, or I'm sure Nicola's would order it for you. It's a good book to put these discussions in a broader context.

Armentrout talked about a sense that this process has been one of "numerous planning ventures that the city government is undertaking in a great rush." Floyd describes this as a process that has "gone on long before issues are brought to the public." According to the AHP Staff Report, this process began in 2007, has been back and forth between planning commission, City Council working sessions, and the Commission's Ordinance Revisions Committee. The staff report also describes this as part of the process of implementing recommendations in the Non-Motorized Plan and Northeast Areas Plan. At the 5th Ward meeting I attended, it seemed that staff was responsive to the comments offered. This really doesn't seem to me to be a hasty endeavor detached from public participation and public process.

Jack Eaton makes several points. This comment is already getting too long, so I'll just respond to a few.

Eaton writes, "Experimenting with high-minded theories is risky." The 50s and 60s-era zoning we have in our commercial districts was an experiment in "let's drive EVERYWHERE" development. I don't think it works for the environment, and when I look at Washtenaw Avenue east of Platt, Stadium Blvd and Maple between Pauline and Dexter, South Industrial, or a lot of the other commercial developments affected by these changes, I don't think that experiment has worked out too well.

Eaton also writes, "For example, replacing chemo-lawns with more buildings is not necessarily an environmental improvement." Redevelopment of sites that were built before current stormwater and other environmental regulations will often bring them in compliance. If the current K-Mart site on Maple, for example, were re-developed, the new site development would be much better in terms of stormwater runoff.

Eaton also give the example of "the little shopping center at Stadium Boulevard and Packard Road," which he alleges, "could be replaced by a 50 foot tall multi-use building with reduced setbacks from the streets" under the proposed changes. What he fails to take into account in this example is that the lot on that site is pretty small, and any new construction there would still be under the FAR restrictions. So Eaton's 4-story, 50-foot building at 200% FAR could only take up a quarter of the lot. I'm not in real estate or finance, so I don't know the numbers on this, but I can't imagine the cost of building up four stories would work on such a small lot in a residential area. But I could imagine it being a 2-story, mixed-use, retain-and-residential or retail-and-office site. To me that sounds within scale of the neighborhood.

Finally, when I hear people talk about the neighborhoods and areas in Ann Arbor that they love, I usually hear them refer to areas built before our current zoning laws. They talk about the Burn Park and Kerrytown, not Georgetown Mall or Liberty Heights. If our current zoning laws are not giving us the kind of development we want, why shouldn't we change it?

27. By Vivienne Armentrout

August 1, 2009 at 2:10 pm

This comment thread is paralleling a thread on Arbor Update on "what kind of city/development do we want". I'm not sure that this is the place for expounding different competing visions at length, though that question underlies the response to the AHP revisions. Clearly that is the discussion that we need to have as a community.

Unfortunately, we are not having that discussion. Rather than seeking a common vision from the public, the public is being presented with draft plans and ordinances and being invited to comment on them. (A short list: A2D2, AHP, AATPU, and the combined (and edited!) general plan.) The plans and ordinances all assume a certain vision, namely intensive development within the city. While there are public hearings, there is little opportunity to see what the true likely impact of these changes are; rather, the presentations are more along the line of a sales talk. The public may suggest a few changes around the edges, or may protest the overall direction, but there is little opportunity to make substantive suggestions that reflect a different vision of the city.

The nearest attempt to have real public participation was the Calthorpe exercises. These were manipulated toward a predetermined outcome, but did make some attempt to gather preferences at the beginning, rather than the end, of the process. However, many recommendations of the final report are not being followed in the current process.

It is difficult for the public to respond adequately to this torrent of proposed changes that are likely to change the nature of our city (and in fact, that is presented as their selling point). So even if there have been discussions by various bodies open to the public for a couple of years, this is still a very rapid process.

28. By John Floyd

August 1, 2009 at 6:02 pm

Mr. Warpehoski,

Ms. Armentrout has a point - the public is only asked to comment on draft plans and ordinances. There is no public input when plans are being made. That it takes the city a long time to put these drafts into final form does not alter the lack of community input into the bulk of the policy change process. This opaqueness of the pre-draft process, and the "this-is-what-we're-doing-folks, like it or lump it" attitude of city officials, combined with non-responsive "responses" to public enquiries, is what leads to the sense of betrayed trust.

Whether or not current zoning should change, we are not embarked on a process that will change our zoning for the better. It may be a bit narrow to suggest that the only option to current zoning is to give carte blanche to the current political class.