

**Subject:** 711 Church St. and our Housing Crisis

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**From:** Adam Goodman  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 8, 2024 9:55 AM  
**To:** City Council <[CityCouncil@a2gov.org](mailto:CityCouncil@a2gov.org)>  
**Cc:** Planning <[Planning@a2gov.org](mailto:Planning@a2gov.org)>  
**Subject:** 711 Church St. and our Housing Crisis

Members of City Council,

I'm writing today with a simple question: do we have a housing crisis or not?

I think it's extremely clear that we do have a housing crisis. Rent and purchase prices are crazy, even compared to 5 years ago when I bought my house for a price that already seemed excessive. Professor friends tell me their students can't concentrate in class because of housing stress, and [reports say](#) that U-M on-campus housing was full within 3 hours of opening applications for returning students. [Jennifer Hall noted recently](#) that U-M students are increasingly moving out to Ypsilanti and commuting, and as a result, AAHC voucher recipients (who already couldn't afford rentals in Ann Arbor) are getting priced out. I could go on.

But if I only look at the way the city is behaving, then I must conclude that the city thinks that everything is fine. This business-as-usual approach to planning and development looks for reasons to say "no" rather than "yes", it takes subjective interpretations of vague standards and treats them as ironclad red lines, it slow-walks the development process to the point that only the largest and wealthiest developers can even afford to participate, and most of all it makes the perfect the enemy of the good. The moment that we're in calls for us to take an approach that I could only describe as the exact opposite of this.

I'm writing, of course, in response to a majority of the Planning Commission voting to recommend denial of the [proposed development at 711 Church](#), after an excruciating 3-hour-long discussion. While I'm under no illusion that this project alone will solve our housing crisis, it would make a bigger dent than most:

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- It would directly add 1,031 beds of student housing one block from Central Campus
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- It would contribute \$7.1 Million to our affordable housing fund (as amended on Tuesday). For context, our FY24 budget says the citywide affordable housing millage will raise about \$7.2 Million in the entire year. This one project would double our annual affordable-housing revenue - funding that's badly needed, as development costs for AAHC's planned affordable
- developments continue to rise precipitously.
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- It would have significant sustainability features and use electric-only appliances and systems to the greatest extent possible under the constraints of DTE's available capacity.
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- It would achieve all of this with relatively limited (and unbundled!) car parking, contributing to our
- VMT-reduction and traffic safety goals.
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This project is not perfect. It's not 100% electric, it's not "net zero", and it still includes too much car parking for my taste. But again, *we must stop making the perfect the enemy of the good* - and yet what I heard from planning commissioners on Tuesday was exactly this behavior. I heard that it's not sustainable enough, it needs to have no natural-gas connection at all [not even for a backup generator that's critical for health and safety], it needs to pay even more into the affordable housing fund, and it's not special enough to justify this zoning designation. Most of all, I heard that density and height were a negative that needed to be offset or mitigated - which... what? Again, this is a block from South University / Central Campus, and we are in a housing crisis! The more units/beds we can get in a location like this, the better. In fact, the developer [already scaled down](#) this development significantly in response to negative feedback from the city. If anything, I wish it were bigger and taller.

There are other issues beyond our housing crisis that this project would also help address - namely, the city's [potentially-problematic fiscal future](#). This development would contribute an estimated [\\$5 Million annually](#) in property taxes to the city, the schools, etc. Meanwhile, just looking at a map, this parcel is sandwiched between existing properties owned by U-M. If this development proposal should fail, I'd be very concerned that they would purchase it and take it off our tax rolls entirely.

City Council gets the final say on this development proposal, so you all have the opportunity to "fix" this. I urge you to vote in favor of this plan when it comes before you. But more than that, I urge you to take action to reform our policies and processes so we can stop making the perfect the enemy of the good, and start finding reasons to say "yes" rather than "no" to projects that meet critical needs in our community. I understand that some of the reforms we need to make are best solved through the comprehensive plan and a subsequent comprehensive zoning-reform effort, but that will take several years and frankly we can't wait that long to start addressing this crisis. We need to take every opportunity available to us, in the meantime, to make progress.

- Adam