

Comments to Planning Commission on  
R4C/R2A Citizen's Advisory Committee and  
Ordinance Revision Committee Reports

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My name is Eleanor Linn, 1321 Forest Court. I have lived for the past 31 years in an R4C house that I own close to downtown and the UM campus. Since I am very concerned about the future of the R4C, I attended nearly all of the stakeholder meetings, the Advisory Committee and Ordinance Review Committee meetings and read the reports carefully.

I think we need to be cautious in the changes that might be made to the current R4C and R2A Zoning, especially in light of the problems that have recently come up concerning D1 and D2 downtown zoning. Watching the A2D2 process unfurl and seeing the buildings that have recently been proposed for that area, it is clear to me that zoning regulations with numbers are respected far more than general statements of goals and desirable outcomes. I am particularly concerned with how the City will strengthen and enforce the "important character of existing neighborhoods...and de-incentivize demolition of existing structure to create new, larger structures."

Ann Arbor is a livable, walkable city where people of different age groups and economic levels interact in their daily lives. For that reason, I recommend the following:

- Along with a minimum parcel size and width, there should be a maximum size for parcels zoned R4C. This will eliminate anyone's ability to combine large numbers of lots, which would obviously ruin the streetscape of a neighborhood.
- There should be height limits to R4C and R2A buildings. Permitting third or subsequent stories is highly problematic to preserving the streetscape. On streets where they do exist historically (e.g. Kingsley, Oakland), there are sloping roofs and dormer windows that blend well with the scale of the old houses.
- Lot combinations should be limited to 2. Granting discretion to the Planning Commission and Zoning Board will only open decisions to the kind of bullying that we are currently experiencing around construction in the downtown area. Developers will threaten to sue the city and this fear of litigation will make planning and zoning officials feel forced into approving projects that are not in the City's best interest.
- The few anomalously large lots in the R4C should be rezoned to something else. That will help eliminate the potential inequity of some existing lots being larger than the combination of 3 or more smaller lots, which would not be permitted.
- In the R2A regulations (or in ZORO), there must be a strict and specific definition of a duplex, probably a configuration in which units are either superimposed vertically or connected along the length of a major wall. Otherwise, we risk having two or more buildings on a site, connected only by a breezeway, fence, or flimsy piece of construction material.

The so-called Phase 2 New Zoning District is highly problematic. At the ORC meetings, it was routinely called “The Student Slum,” “The Ghetto,” “The Group Housing Area,” and “the area to be torn down.” These are the buildings that need better maintenance and enforcement of rules, which the committee said was not within its authority. Removing strict guidelines for construction will only reward the most remiss of property owners and may result in the destruction of historic houses and a walkable cityscape that serves as a pass-through for residents going to and from surrounding neighborhoods to downtown and the UM central campus.

- FAR formulas should not replace required setbacks and height limitations. With them we are likely to get much larger and bulkier buildings that will irrevocably ruin the streetscape of these neighborhoods, as experience shows that we are much less likely to predict the outcome of FAR calculations on given parcels.
- Special exception use should not be waived, as we may well find ourselves plagued with unregulated fraternities/sororities, rooming houses, and unsupervised group living housing situations mixed in with smaller residential dwellings.

I also question the proposal to permit landlords the option of converting larger units into smaller ones with fewer bedrooms. Given the surge of student apartment towers in the downtown, some people predict that more families will want to rehabilitate houses in the R4C. The cost of renovation is quite high after a house has been rented to different transient groups over a period of years. It is prohibitively higher, if the house has been subdivided with more locked doors, tiny kitchens, and a warren of narrow hallways.

I therefore urge you to consider making these regulations quantifiably specific and hope that you will completely abandon the idea of the Phase 2 New Zoning District.