

From: Julie Ritter <ritter.julie@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, December 04, 2020 9:45 AM

To: Disch, Lisa <LDisch@a2gov.org>

Cc: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>; Hayner, Jeff <JHayner@a2gov.org>; Taylor, Christopher (Mayor) <CTaylor@a2gov.org>; Griswold, Kathy <KGriswold@a2gov.org>; Song, Linh <LSong@a2gov.org>; Radina, Travis <TRadina@a2gov.org>; Grand, Julie <JGrand@a2gov.org>; Eyer, Jen <JEyer@a2gov.org>; Nelson, Elizabeth <ENelson@a2gov.org>; Briggs, Erica <EBriggs@a2gov.org>; Ramlawi, Ali <ARamlawi@a2gov.org>

Subject: Usual Suspects

Lisa, your true from the heart remarks at the Planning Commission Meeting, which have been widely circulated, made me want to change my name for zoom meetings from "Julie" to "Usual Suspect" and to suggest that everyone else do the same. BUT

Politics is so divided in the country and in our town that I thought better of it. Though it still is tempting. How can you claim to represent people you despise? That is my question. I am very curious and look forward to an answer that is just as honest as the remarks you made at that meeting.

Respectfully,

Julie Ritter

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I'm beginning to think "hindsight is 2020" was some kind of message from a future time traveler that we all misunderstood. - Victoria Guida

From: Julie Ritter <ritter.julie@gmail.com>

Sent: Sunday, December 06, 2020 5:47 PM

To: CityCouncil <CityCouncil@a2gov.org>; Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>; Crawford, Tom <TCrawford@a2gov.org>

Subject: The Usual Suspects - Walk The Talk

Lisa, in response to my email to you of Friday morning you sent me the following:

"Thank you for reaching out. It is important to hear from as broad a range of constituents as possible, always. There are some folks who regularly participate in public comment, some of whom are my supporters and some not. I hope to hear from a broad range of people, including those who are already familiar to me and those who are not familiar to me, in the upcoming public comment period on the Transportation Plan, and I am interested in what everyone in Ward One has to say about the mobility values and goals laid out in the plan."

Lisa Disch | Ward One City Council Representative

City of Ann Arbor

301 E. Huron Street

Ann Arbor, MI 48107-8647

Lisa. I would like to have been able to reply in a completely kind and generous manner to your reply to my email of Friday morning. I do thank you for replying to my question, even though you chose to not actually answer my question by providing the honest explanation I hoped for. I don't know which surprised me more: the things you said at the Planning Commission Meeting, your insubstantial response, or your resolution DC-3 that you co-sponsored late Friday.

The fact that you have co-sponsored DC-3, a very incomprehensible proposition on an extremely important and sensitive issue, without any public engagement, public education, public input of any kind, shows that your reply to me is truly meaningless.

Following are three versions of my reply. A short version, a medium version and a long version. You can choose to contemplate any, all, or none of them.

Short Version:

Walk the talk.

Medium Version:

If what you claim in your reply is true (which there is no reason to believe - see long version) then you and everyone in City Council, the Planning Department and Planning Commission might consider changing how work is currently being done. The City could

make a much bigger point to reach out to people, whether they are part of your base of supporters or not, with public engagement on not only planning, land use and transportation issues that will affect residents' lives in a significant way, but also being responsive to other issues both large (The Gelman Plume) and small. Including the inconvenient problems of daily living concerning the City that constituents may bring to you. Potholes. Sanitation issues. Things like that.

Walk the talk.

Long Version:

I was surprised to see you say at the Planning Commission that you want to avoid public engagement and then send me a reply that includes "It is important to hear from as broad a range of constituents as possible". And then co-sponsor DC-3 late on a Friday afternoon with no prior engagement on this resolution with the public in Ann Arbor.

What I heard in your Planning Commission remarks was blanket disdain for ANY and ALL public engagement on the land use and transportation planning process because of "the usual suspects" giving "pushback". Your statement made no distinction between supporters and those you know, versus people you do not know, or people who may disagree with you. My email to you was a response to the blanket disdain to all constituents, no matter their loyalties or opinions.

Your co-sponsorship of DC-3 with no public announcement, outreach or engagement expands your pattern of dismissing the citizens of Ann Arbor, en masse, from a significant issue affecting all.

I did not hear anything in your Planning Commission remarks about your "base" supporters versus others who do not know you or do not support you. It is you who brought up that distinction in your response. You identified different categories of constituents. I infer from your statements that you value your "base" more than others who either do not know you or who you do not specifically identify as supporters.

How do you know who, out of all your constituents, supported you and who did not?

Your statement at the Planning Commission did not not completely surprise me. There is a growing body of evidence that the Planning Department, Planning Commission and the City Council really do not want public engagement/outreach for any land use, planning or transportation issues, or, in fact, anything. Some examples:

- Recent remarks by yourself and by CM Linh Song regarding aversion to public engagement, specifically pushback and costs (which should not be used as blanket excuses to avoid such engagement).
- December 2019 by the Council's actions to table the Master Plan consultant hire due specifically to Howard Lazarus's (and he was just one of a larger cohort)

strong objection specifically to the issue of broad, non-biased public outreach and engagement.

- Through your remarks about the transportation plan shaping land use and not having the public involved. "There is broader agreement around Vision Zero goals for transportation safety and not everyone wants to make the connection the new transportation plan makes between transportation and land use, Disch said."
- The visual of you at a recent City Council meeting waving around a book entitled "Freedom Is An Endless Meeting" while another Council Member was speaking. At the same time you posted in your newsletter that Council is exploring ways to shorten meetings. And even though the claim is to retain public input, everyone who has participated in City politics for any length of time is keenly aware that this public input is a major contributor to long meetings. Particularly when sensitive issues are concerned.
- Your remarks in your newsletter indicated that Council is exploring shortening their meetings because to paraphrase, long meetings place a hardship on working people and people caring for children. (As an aside, I don't know anyone who works harder than people caring for children so don't know why you make that distinction). And who doesn't work? Retirees, perhaps? What I really suspect is the Council Members are looking for ways to shorten their time commitment but want to put the onus on "working people".
- Your co-sponsorship, along with CM Briggs, of DC-3 which is astonishing to all, and could potentially delay or undo years of work by literally hundreds of people, with no explanation or outreach

I infer from your reply, taking it out to a logical step, that you might, at one time, have considered (or would like to consider in the future) discriminating in public engagement between people who support you and whom you know, and those you do not know or who do not support you. I never mentioned these various categories, yet you made a point of them. I am curious as to how the City might construct such an outreach program? Just theoretically, how would you engage with friends and supporters and leave out those who "push back" or "disagree"?

This question applies whether it is as part of the upcoming public comment period on the transportation plan or on any other issue, large or small. I know from our long ago conversation that you consider "constituent services" a waste of time. So I ask, whom are you serving? Why did you decide to join City Council?

Your single email to me stating that you encourage public engagement, stacked up against all the other things I have seen and heard in the last couple of years including Friday's posting of DC-3 leaves me very skeptical. I guess it is safe to say that when I actually see the Planning Commission, the Planning Department and City Council reaching out consistently, aggressively and through a variety of channels to invite a broad spectrum of citizens to participate in meaningful engagement around land use, transportation and other issues, then I will believe it. The kind of outreach I am talking about is not limited to posting one small ad in the Washtenaw Legal News, an obscure Twitter account or just a post in Legistar late in the day at the end of the week.

Walk the talk.

What I really don't understand is why you and others on Council don't act on the powerful good you could work in the community if you really and truly made an effort to understand everyone's viewpoints, not just use shorthand to label them "base" or "pushback".

Ann Arbor is one of the most educated, intelligent, well read communities on earth. The people who live here are passionate about their city. They are a great wealth of information, informed opinions, good ideas, great suggestions and innovative ways to work through problems. Why you (and the current City Administration in general) don't avail yourself of this superb, untapped resource, just baffles me. There are often very good reasons why people who live here are not willing to fall into line behind the latest, unproven fad or trend in urban planning, land use or transportation. Public input has made tremendous positive changes to many developments and projects over the years. Why don't you, and everyone else in Planning, Council, etc really make an effort to engage with people who see things differently than you and perhaps learn something very worthwhile in the process?

Coming in with preconceived notions, or, worse, being spoon fed preconceived notions, smacks of the kind of opportunism, monied influence and even worse, that we are seeing at the highest levels of government. I hope Ann Arbor is better than that.

You, and many others in the administration and on council, may see me as an antagonist. I see your "anti-engagement" position as antagonistic to everything I have learned about the democratic process in general and politics in Ann Arbor in particular. Whether this is accidental or by design is beside the point. The attitude and fact of exclusion you are demonstrating with your words and deeds has no place in a democracy.

There is a tremendous amount of lip service for engagement in many City processes, plans and presentations, but when all is said and done, the truth is that most of the time not much outreach or engagement takes place. Not always, but more and more as time goes on. If you want me to believe your claims to embrace engagement then please demonstrate your sincerity.

Walk the talk.

As kindly as possible,

Julie Ritter

I'm beginning to think "hindsight is 2020" was some kind of message from a future time traveler that we all misunderstood. - Victoria Guida