

From: Ellen Ramsburgh [<mailto:ejramsburgh@hotmail.com>]
Sent: Monday, November 11, 2013 2:56 PM
To: Planning
Subject: Review of D1 zoning

Dear Planning Commissioners,

I was very disappointed that the discussion of the ENP report and the review of D1 zoning was postponed at the last regular commission meeting. I very much wanted to hear what your opinions and concerns were and thought that the televised meeting in Council Chambers following the public hearing was the best venue and time for that discussion to take place. I am not able to attend the workshop this week so am taking Commissioner Bona's advice and sending the remarks that I made (in part) at the public hearing.

I see that Ypsilanti is conducting a review of their zoning ordinances and are now leaning toward a Form-Based system. I believe that I heard a reluctance for Ann Arbor to take that direction – perhaps because of the work that just went into the downtown planning in 2009, but I think that some of the shortcomings of the D1 zoning could be remedied by an approach more like the Form-Based approach to zoning.

A very important part of the City Council resolution and the Perdu Report is recognizing the conflicts that arise when D1 zoning is adjacent to residential and historic neighborhoods as well as other sensitive sites within the D1 boundaries. I believe the Perdu report is the beginning of the discussion and review of D1, but other sensitive sites should be addressed now rather than later. I generally think the recommendation for both the Ann St and the Huron St sites are correct. However, the recommendations for the site at Main and William are unacceptable. Anything greater than a D2 zoning for that site will create the same problems for the 4th Avenue neighborhood that 413 E. Huron is creating for the Division and Ann St neighborhood.

One of the most important discussions in the report was the Design Review Process. Recommendations made by the Design Review Board were clearly not followed in the case of The Varsity and 413 E. Huron. Context was ignored or misinterpreted in both cases and has resulted in buildings that overwhelm the adjacent historic properties. I agree completely with the following recommendation -

“Requiring the approval of the Design Review Board (DRB) for any project to be eligible for premiums would allow the same development potential of each site (one of the key concerns expressed by property owners and downtown interests) but result in buildings that are better integrated with the surrounding context.” (Perdu report)

“The Historic District Commission process could be used as a model.” (Perdu report)

I would really like to have a representative from the Historic District Commission on the Design Review Board or at least some type of crossover between the two bodies. There are several historic districts within the D1 zone and the way in which new development interfaces with those resources in those districts should be of paramount importance.

The Historic District Commission in two resolutions asked the Planning Commission and City Council to be as diligent in upholding our historic district ordinance, which is a part of our planning documents, as our zoning ordinance. Inappropriate zoning next to historic neighborhoods and resources threatens the livability and viability of the very resources we have elected to protect. It is not just an issue of “tall buildings next to small buildings.” It is an issue of context, sustainability, and promoting new development that will enhance the existing built environment that gives us our “sense of place.”

Thank you for your attention,

Ellen Ramsburgh