

Downtown Area Citizens Advisory Council Meeting Minutes- January 8, 2013 and
Comments to the DDA- January 9, 2013

Last night's CAC meeting was one of reaffirmation of several of our positions on the development of the downtown area. We reaffirmed our commitment to public art in the downtown and throughout our city. We also reaffirmed our commitment of support for the work the DDA has done in involving the public in shaping the goals, objectives and processes for the future development of the five important publicly owned sites in the downtown—particularly their support of a broad range of residential as well as office, and commercial uses. We also reaffirmed our strong opposition to the proposed student highrise at 401-413 East Huron.

We admire the Connecting William Street's commitment to good architecture in the new buildings to be constructed on downtown city-owned sites. We agree that the best public art we have and can encourage is in well-designed architecture and pedestrian friendly streetscapes—some of them historic (just think of the First National Building, the Glazier Building, the Nichols Arcade much of the streetscape of South State and Main Street). Good architecture is our best public art.

We believe in supporting the best in architectural design. The CAC played a major part in encouraging the development of Ann Arbor's A2D2 Downtown Design Guidelines and our Downtown Design Guidelines Review Board. We are very pleased that for future projects on the five downtown public sites, the Connecting William Street recommendations asks the Planning Commission to report to City Council how future developers considered changes in their design in response to the Design Review Board process. And, the DDA's Connecting William Street recommendations on "Density and Massing" for future buildings on city-owned downtown lots makes clear that "surrounding context should be considered and buildings designed to step back from lower-scale neighbors." We believe that what the DDA's proposed Connecting William Street pattern requires for developments on what is City-owned property should also be required for all new buildings in the downtown—private and public.

That includes the massive student high rise being proposed at 401-413 East Huron. Our 2009 Downtown Plan includes a section on Development Character and "Sensitivity to Context". It establishes as a goal: "Encourage design approaches which minimize the extent to which high-rise buildings create negative impacts in terms of scale, shading, and blocking views." The city's Central Area Plan recognizes potential conflicts in areas where the downtown commercial core meets low-scale downtown residential areas. In the case of 401-413, East Huron, our Historic District Commission recently passed a resolution saying that 413 E. Huron is "incompatible in scale and massing" with the adjacent Old Fourth Ward Historic District. It would "severely and adversely impact" that District.

Architecture that has a negative impact upon its neighbors is not good architecture.

Two of the members of the CAC live in Sloan Plaza. Their sunlight will be gone forever. I repeat: Architecture that threatens to negatively impact the context in which it is being built is not good architecture. It is certainly not in the realm of public art. Its impact upon the nearby residential, historic district is, in fact, a threat to public art. Think of its impact upon the nationally famous Wilson/Wahr/Sallade House on the corner of Ann and North Division.

We hope we can extend the commitment of the Connecting William Street recommendations for strengthening the Design Review Process. We should only approve good architectural design in the downtown—architecture that is good public art.