

Downtown Area Citizens Advisory Council Meeting Minutes September 4, 2012 and  
Comments to the DDA September 5, 2012

Last night's meeting of the Downtown Area CAC was almost entirely devoted to reviewing a large packet of articles on housing and commercial development issues that were reported in the months of June, July and August since our last regular meeting in June. Our July meeting actually took place on two occasions in August--a tour of Zaragon West and when we met with Amber Miller and Susan Pollay as a Stakeholder's group to take the Connecting William Street survey dealing with future priorities and strategies for the five downtown city parking sites.

Under the headings of "Building Boom" and "Tight Rental Market" our discussion included the Underground Parking Structure, the Blake Transit Center, the Ann Arbor District Library as well as the Varsity Project, 618 S. Main, the Landmark, Zaragon West, City Apartments, the Greek Church, Ed Shaffran's plans to put condos and apartments on top of the three story Goodyear Building on S. Main Street, Howard Frehsee's Building on S. State, Barracuda and plans for the former Borders Building, Zingerman's additions, the White Market closing, and the vote on Public Art. We also included a couple of unannounced developments that we know about but have not yet been reported: Ed Shaffran's purchase and plan to put apartments in the Karl Brauer office Building on Fifth Avenue and Catherine, and the recent purchase of Papa Johns Pizza and the Zahn properties by the Connecticut firm Greenfield Partners. They had already bought a \$ 4 ½ million large property next door at 413 E. Huron. They plan a future high-rise housing extending from just west of Sloan Plaza to N. Division Street.

There's a lot going on in the A2D2 area—and, in relation to the development projects, we have actively supported all of them. Although we try to make them better when we have the opportunity to do so—particularly through the Downtown Design Review Board. The downtown is doing well and we are committed to its continued future success.

We also discussed the news report of possible DDA support for proceeds from the future sale of the five downtown parking sites going toward affordable housing in the city's housing trust fund. Members of the CAC have always supported affordable housing. But CAC members asked me to caution the DDA and the City Council that we should all be committed to maintaining and improving existing safe and affordable low income housing in the downtown--whether it's in the Delonis Center, Baker's Commons, or the privately owned Courthouse Square. Also, where affordable housing is increased in the near downtown, we generally support preserving and rehabbing existing housing units for low-income occupants rather than tearing down existing affordable housing to build new.

Finally, last night's wide-ranging exchange ended with a discussion of the CAC's commitment to developments outside the DDA area. We all agreed that a part of our efforts in the future should be directed to a vision for North Main, including the extension of the Allen Creek Greenway, the DTE site and a comprehensive plan for the Huron River frontage. It must also include all public transportation developments, particularly the future of the railroad and the site of a future railroad station. Like it or not, we know those are considerations that have a direct relation impact on the future of our downtown.