

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES STAFF REPORT

For Planning Commission Meeting of February 19, 2009

SUBJECT: Amendments to the Downtown Plan

PROPOSED CITY PLANNING COMMISSION MOTION

The Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby adopts the Downtown Plan, as amended, as a subplan of the City Master Plan and hereby incorporates the Future Land Use Map and Zoning Plan for the downtown into the Central Area Plan.

PROPOSED CITY PLANNING COMMISSION MOTION

The Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby recommends that the City Council adopt the Downtown Plan, as amended, as a subplan of the City Master Plan and thereby incorporate the Future Land Use Map and Zoning Plan for the downtown into the Central Area Plan.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Downtown Plan, as amended, be **approved**. The proposed amendments are consistent with Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown (A2D2) recommendations approved by City Council in 2007 and reflect additional input from the Planning Commission, members of the public and Washtenaw County agencies.

STAFF REPORT

The Planning Commission held a duly noticed public hearing and tabled action on the draft Downtown Plan amendments on August 5, 2008. The Commission subsequently postponed action on the amended plan as additional public input on the Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown (A2D2) zoning and parking amendments was collected.

Since September 2008, staff has held over two dozen briefings on the A2D2 amendments. Comments from that effort were reviewed by the Planning Commission on February 10, 2009 (see related staff report).

The attached draft Downtown Plan incorporates three substantive revisions to the August 29, 2008 draft:

1. The Existing Floor Area to Lot Area Map (Figure 7) has been revised to include data about University of Michigan properties adjoining the downtown.
2. The Future Land Use Map (Figure 9) and the Future Base and Overlay Zoning Plan Map (Figure 14) have been revised to remove recommendations for the 600 block of South Ashley (west side). The Planning Commission determined that, due to its location outside of the Downtown Development Authority District and in the Old West Side

Historic District, future land use for this block would be better addressed through updates to the Central Area recommendations.

3. The zoning plan has been revised to describe proposed zoning changes in more general terms and to note where existing zoning should remain unchanged.

If adopted by the Planning Commission, the amended Downtown Plan will be forwarded to City Council for adoption prior to the final action on the A2D2 zoning and parking amendments.

Prepared by Wendy Rampson, Systems Planner
2/13/09

c: A2D2 Steering Committee
City Attorney
Downtown Development Authority

Attachments: September 16, 2008 Staff Report
September 4, 2008 Staff Report
August 5, 2008 Staff Report
February 12, 2009 Draft Downtown Plan Amendments

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES STAFF REPORT

For Planning Commission Meeting of September 16, 2008

SUBJECT: Amendments to the Downtown Plan

PROPOSED CITY PLANNING COMMISSION MOTION

The Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby adopts the Downtown Plan, as amended, as a subplan of the City Master Plan and hereby incorporates the Future Land Use Map and Zoning Plan for the downtown into the Central Area Plan.

PROPOSED CITY PLANNING COMMISSION MOTION

The Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby recommends that the City Council adopt the Downtown Plan, as amended, as a subplan of the City Master Plan and thereby incorporate the Future Land Use Map and Zoning Plan for the downtown into the Central Area Plan.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Downtown Plan, as amended, be **approved**. The proposed amendments are consistent with Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown (A2D2) recommendations approved by City Council in 2007 and reflect additional input from the Planning Commission, members of the public and Washtenaw County agencies.

STAFF REPORT

At the September 4, 2008 Planning Commission meeting, the public hearing and discussion for this item was postponed to September 16, 2008.

A question was raised at the September 4th public hearing on the A2D2 amendments as to whether the South University area is considered part of the "Core" and if so, the justification for this designation. The following timeline provides background about the plans and policy for the South University area that were the basis for the Downtown Zoning Advisory Committee's recommendation to include South University in the Core.

South University Area Planning Background

When the current zoning ordinance was adopted in 1963, the South University area was zoned C1 Local Business District. In 1966, in response to the recommendations of the Central City High Rise and Parking Study, the South University area was rezoned to C1A Campus Business District (200% by right/400% with premiums; no height limit) and C1A/R Campus Business/Residential District (300% by right/600% with premiums, no height limit). Pedestrian amenity premiums were added to the zoning ordinance at that time.

The 1988 Downtown Plan included little specific guidance for the South University commercial area. South University was identified as a separate district that was neither Core nor Interface, surrounded by a "neighborhood edge" following the Downtown Development Authority boundary. One of the plan maps (Figure 12) indicates that the C1A district along South University should be considered for revised premiums to create incentives for housing, retail and other plan objectives. This map also indicates reducing the maximum floor area ratio (FAR) in the C1A/R districts located north and south of South University to "differentiate from downtown Core" and to introduce height limits. The Housing map (Figure 35) notes "encourage moderate density housing in a mixed use context for this area."

In 2003, City Council commissioned the Downtown Residential Task Force to explore ways to eliminate barriers to residential development in downtown. The committee noted that "very restrictive FARs, and no residential premiums in some areas such as the South University corridor (designated C1A and C1A/R) that are otherwise ripe for more residential development, constrict additional development in the most urban parts of the city" (page 15). The report's recommendations included extension of the current downtown zoning to the South University area to allow 4-6 story buildings (page 16). Council accepted the report on July 19, 2004.

In response to the Downtown Residential Task Force report, City Council hired Calthorpe & Associates in 2005 to conduct a visioning effort as the first step in making zoning changes for the downtown. The Vision and Policy Framework for Downtown report, accepted by City Council on March 20, 2006, makes the following recommendations for the South University area:

- Establish "a new zoning overlay and set of design guidelines that 1) Creates a dense, mixed-use core area that is connected to adjacent neighborhoods. The Downtown core will be anchored by four retail and entertainment centers, Main Street, State Street, Kerrytown, and South University and should attempt to strengthen the connection between the centers while retaining their distinct identity" (page 19).
- The "structural plan" identifies maximum heights in the range of 3-8 stories and a FAR of 500% in the South University area, with additional allowances for premiums to exceed these limitations (page 20), with an emphasis on new residential development (page 23).
- The "vision plan" illustrates "higher intensity development along the South University corridor that caters not only to the needs of the students but also the community as a whole" (page 54).

Council accepted the Vision and Policy Framework for Downtown report on March 20, 2006 and approved an Implementation Plan that identified the creation of downtown overlay zoning as a high priority project.

Subsequent to Council action on the Calthorpe report, the Planning Commission initiated a rezoning of the South University area to C2A (400% by right/600% with premiums, no height limit), in addition to text amendments to the zoning and off-street parking ordinances. The text amendments were developed to clarify the application of residential premiums, remove upper story side and rear setback requirements from the C2A district and re-describe the parking exempt district to include C2A parcels outside of the Downtown Development Authority District. City Council approved the South University rezoning and text amendments in November 2006.

In October 2006, City Council appointed the Downtown Zoning Advisory Committee (DZAC) to implement the recommendation for new overlay zoning in the downtown. The DZAC recommendations, which were approved by City Council in October 2007, identify the South University area as part of the downtown Core, consistent with the recent C2A rezoning.

Staff has been working with the Planning Commission since December 2007 to implement the DZAC recommendations through amendments to the Downtown Plan and the zoning and off-street parking ordinances.

Revisions to "Core Areas" Recommendations

The attached revisions were developed by staff to clarify that the South University area is intended to be included as a "Core" area of downtown. Staff recommends that these revisions be incorporated into the August 29, 2008 draft.

Relationship to A2D2 Code Amendments

Staff recommends that the Downtown Plan amendments be considered concurrently with the A2D2 code amendments. If the A2D2 code amendments are tabled at the September 16, 2008 meeting, staff recommends that the Planning Commission table the Downtown Plan amendments until such times as the A2D2 amendments are brought back for action.

Prepared by Wendy Rampson, Systems Planner
9/11/08

c: City Attorney
Downtown Development Authority

Attachments: September 11, 2008 Revisions to "Core Area" (page 28)
August 5, 2008 Staff Report
August 5, 2008 Updated Staff Report
August 29, 2008 Draft Downtown Plan Amendments (under separate cover)

DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

Core Areas S

Goal: Encourage downtown's highest density development and tallest buildings to locate within the Core area [SEE FIGURE 9] to create the critical mass of activity and density needed to support a range of central retail, service, cultural, residential, and entertainment functions and transportation modes.

Main Street, State Street and South University

The Core Areas include downtown's largest retail areas; its highest concentration of office use; its principal civic functions (city, county, and federal government services; the central library); and major hotels. The Core Areas also include much of downtown's highest density development and its tallest buildings, creating a physical identity which reinforces its functional role as the center of downtown activity. It is a relatively compact area which, because of its mix of uses, concentration of activity generators, and density of development, serves as a focus of intensive pedestrian use.

Because the Core Areas are the traditional center of downtown commercial development, they contain important retail concentrations and significant numbers of older and historic buildings which add to its special identity and visual appeal. These buildings and uses help to establish a strong pedestrian orientation in portions of the Core, defining its primary system of pedestrian connections. These qualities of identity, interest, scale, and amenity are valued assets which must be protected as new development occurs.

These positive characteristics can be maintained and strengthened while encouraging higher density development to concentrate in downtown's Core Areas. To achieve this balance, priorities for the protection of important historic structures must be established and compatibility with the existing development context must be encouraged in the design of new buildings. Guidelines will be needed to illustrate principles for designing these new buildings to (1) add to the pedestrian character of streets and sidewalks and (2) provide positive transitions in scale and height.

Recommended Action Strategies

- (1) Replace the existing zoning designations that make up the Core areas (C1A, C1A/R, C2A, C2A/R and P) with a new Downtown Core zoning district.
- (2) Develop upper story setback requirements for properties in the Downtown Core that abut residentially zoned land.
- (3) Revise existing zoning premiums, and create premiums where not currently available, to establish incentives for achieving Core Areas objectives: residential development, affordable housing, "green" building, historic preservation, public parking and transferred development rights and public and private open space.
- (4) Incorporate recommended land use and urban design objectives as overlay zoning districts for the review and approval of projects in the Core Areas.
- (5) Discourage "auto oriented commercial" land uses.
- (6) Encourage structured (rather than surface) parking that integrates bicycle, motorcycle and moped parking with vehicular parking. Below grade parking structures should be encouraged in major projects.

Revised: September 11, 2008

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES STAFF REPORT

For Planning Commission Meeting of September 4, 2008

SUBJECT: Amendments to the Downtown Plan

PROPOSED CITY PLANNING COMMISSION MOTION

The Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby adopts the Downtown Plan, as amended, as a subplan of the City Master Plan and hereby incorporates the Future Land Use Map and Zoning Plan for the downtown into the Central Area Plan.

PROPOSED CITY PLANNING COMMISSION MOTION

The Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby recommends that the City Council adopt the Downtown Plan, as amended, as a subplan of the City Master Plan and thereby incorporate the Future Land Use Map and Zoning Plan for the downtown into the Central Area Plan.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Downtown Plan, as amended, be **tabled** to allow additional time for consideration of the A2D2 code amendments, which are being reviewed concurrently with the Downtown Plan amendments.

STAFF REPORT

The attached document incorporates the changes provided by staff to the Commission at the August 5, 2008 meeting, in addition to the following items requested by the Commission:

- A summary of the Comprehensive Plan for Washtenaw County has been added to the Planning Context section (page 5).
- A reference to footing drain disconnects has been added to the Infrastructure Systems section (page 19).
- References to transportation have been added to the Sustainability principle (page 20) and the Concentrated Diversity of Activity goal (page 22).
- In the Retail Environment section, text has been added to the goal to encourage "a balanced mix" of active uses and to Action 2 to attract "locally owned" businesses (page 23).
- A new section entitled 'Zoning Plan' has been added.
- Two figures have been added as part of the Zoning Plan section: Figure 14 – Base and Overlay Zoning Plan and Figure 15 – Future Building Frontage Zoning Plan.

The City Attorney's Office recommends that the Downtown Plan amendments be considered concurrently with the A2D2 amendments. Because the A2D2 code amendments are proposed to be tabled at the September 4, 2008 meeting for additional public review and comment, staff recommends that the Planning Commission table the Downtown Plan amendments until such time as the A2D2 amendments are brought back for action.

Amendments to the Downtown Plan
Page 2

Prepared by Wendy Rampson, Systems Planner
Approved by Jayne Miller, Community Services Administrator
8/28/08

Attachments: August 5, 2008 Staff Report
 August 5, 2008 Updated Staff Report
 August 29, 2008 Draft Downtown Plan Amendments – go to
 www.a2gov.org/a2d2/zoning/Documents/DowntownPlan-8-29-08LR.pdf

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES STAFF REPORT

Updated For Planning Commission Meeting of August 5, 2008

SUBJECT: Amendments to the Downtown Plan

PROPOSED CITY PLANNING COMMISSION MOTION

The Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby adopts the Downtown Plan, as amended, as a subplan of the City Master Plan.

PROPOSED CITY PLANNING COMMISSION MOTION

The Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby recommends that the City Council adopt the Downtown Plan, as amended, as a subplan of the City Master Plan.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Downtown Plan, as amended, be **tabled**. Additional time is needed to ensure that the proposed amendments are consistent with the new Michigan Planning Enabling Act, which goes into effect on September 1, 2008.

STAFF REPORT

In the time since the original staff report for this project was finalized, project staff met with the City Attorney's Office to review the draft plan's compliance with the recently adopted Michigan Planning Enabling Act. The attached revisions were developed in response to the new requirements.

The City Attorney's Office has recommended that the Downtown Plan amendments be tabled at this time so they can be scheduled for adoption concurrent with the proposed zoning changes.

Prepared by Wendy Rampson, Systems Planner
8/5/08

Attachments: August 5, 2008 Revisions to Draft Downtown Plan Amendments

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES STAFF REPORT

For Planning Commission Meeting of August 5, 2008

SUBJECT: Amendments to the Downtown Plan

PROPOSED CITY PLANNING COMMISSION MOTION

The Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby adopts the Downtown Plan, as amended, as an element of the City Master Plan.

PROPOSED CITY PLANNING COMMISSION MOTION

The Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby recommends that the City Council adopt the Downtown Plan, as amended, as an element of the City Master Plan.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Downtown Plan, as amended, be **approved**. The proposed amendments are consistent with Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown (A2D2) recommendations approved by City Council in 2007 and reflect additional input from the Planning Commission's Master Plan Review Committee, the Washtenaw County Department of Planning & Environment, the Washtenaw County Department of Public Health and the Washtenaw Area Transportation Study. Adoption of these amendments will support the proposed A2D2 zoning and urban design amendments currently under review.

STAFF REPORT

In October 2007, City Council passed Resolutions R-07-494 and R-07-495, which approved the downtown zoning and urban design recommendations developed by two citizen advisory committees as part of the Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown initiative. The resolution requested that the City Planning Commission initiate amendments to the Downtown Plan to support the implementation of these recommendations.

The Downtown Plan was adopted by the Planning Commission and City Council as an element of the master plan in 1988. The plan was updated in 1992 as part of the Central Area Plan process. A number of the plan's recommendations have been implemented by the City and the Downtown Development Authority. A renewed interest in downtown development in the early 2000's prompted a re-examination of downtown planning issues, resulting in the Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown recommendations.

The Master Plan Review Committee met six times since January 2008 to review revisions to the Downtown Plan (see attached). This draft plan contains much of the same wording as the original plan, but updates it where more recent guidance has been provided by the Downtown Development Strategies Implementation Plan (produced by Calthorpe and Associates in 2006), the A2D2 advisory committee recommendations, and Master Plan Review Committee recommendations.

Highlights of the changes include:

- The existing condition narrative and maps have been updated (pages 7 through 19).
- Existing condition information has been added for transportation and infrastructure systems (pages 13 and 19).
- Guiding values for infrastructure capacity and sustainability have been added (page 20).
- Recommendations for sustainable public infrastructure systems have been added (page 21).
- The core/interface map has been revised to indicate future land uses (page 30).
- A section on non-motorized recommendations has been added, reinforcing the recommendation of the Non-Motorized Transportation Plan (page 43).
- The parking principles recommended by the A2D2 parking and transportation advisory committee have been incorporated into the Parking section (page 45).
- The recommendations of the A2D2 development review advisory committee have been incorporated into the Development Review section (page 49).
- The recommendations of the A2D2 zoning and urban design advisory committees, such as additional premium options, zoning changes and design guidelines, have been incorporated throughout the document, where appropriate.
- Changes recommended by the Washtenaw County agencies have been incorporated throughout the document, where appropriate.
- The section on Streetscape improvements has been edited to remove the references for pedestrian, shared and vehicular streets, since this classification system is no longer used in developing streetscape plans.

The amended Downtown Plan was distributed for public comment in May 2008. Comments were compiled by the Washtenaw County Department of Planning & Environment and transmitted in July 2008. These comments are attached.

Notice of the public hearing was provided to all organizations registered with the Planning & Development Services Unit, and a press release was distributed on July 30, 2008.

Prepared by Wendy Rampson, Systems Planner
Reviewed by Mark Lloyd
jsj/7/31/08

Attachments: Compiled Comments from Washtenaw County Planning & Environment
July 24, 2008 Draft Downtown Plan Amendments (under separate cover)



COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
220 NORTH MAIN STREET, P.O. BOX 8645
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN 48107-8645
(734) 222-6850
FAX (734) 222-6715

TO: Jeff Irwin
Chair of Board of Commissioners

THROUGH: Robert E. Guenzel
County Administrator

FROM: Anthony VanDerworp, Director
Department of Planning and Environment

DATE: July 2, 2008

SUBJECT: City of Ann Arbor Downtown Plan Amendment

BACKGROUND

The City of Ann Arbor (City) submitted an amendment to its Master Plan on May 19, 2008, for comment by Washtenaw County, in accordance with the procedures set forth in the Municipal Planning Act, Public Act 285 of 1931 as amended. The Act requires the County to provide comments, which are advisory only, to the City. The comments must include, but need not be limited to, both of the following as applicable:

- A statement whether the county, after considering any comments received from adjacent local units of government, considers the proposed plan to be inconsistent with the plan of contiguous community (city, village, township or region), and
- A statement whether the county considers the plan to be inconsistent with the county plan.

DISCUSSION

Department of Planning and Environment staff evaluated the proposed amendment according to the goals, objectives and recommendations of *A Comprehensive Plan for Washtenaw County*. The Department of Planning and Environment distributed the amendment to the Washtenaw County Departments of Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Public Health, Washtenaw County Road Commission, Office of the Drain Commissioner and the Washtenaw Area Transportation Study (WATS) for comment. Comments received from these departments and agencies are included in the attached staff report.

The Revisions were reviewed and approved by the Washtenaw County Planning Advisory Board at their June 23, 2008 meeting. In the interests of following the 40 day comment period as stipulated in the Municipal Planning Act (Act 285 of 1931 as amended) the Revisions are forwarded to the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners as a County staff report for review. After acceptance of the report by the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners, the report will be submitted to the City and the contiguous communities.

ATTACHMENTS

- Draft Cover Letter
- Staff Report

A RESOLUTION TO ACCEPT COMMENTS FROM WASHTENAW COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT STAFF ON THE CITY OF ANN ARBOR DOWNTOWN PLAN AMENDMENT AND DIRECT THE COUNTY CLERK TO SEND COMMENTS TO THE CITY OF ANN ARBOR AND THE CONTIGUOUS LOCAL UNITS OF GOVERNMENT

WASHTENAW COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

July 2, 2008

WHEREAS, Public Act 285 of 1931("the Act") requires that the County submit comments on the proposed City of Ann Arbor Downtown Plan Amendments; and

WHEREAS, the Act requires that the comments include, but not be limited to, a statement whether the proposed revisions are considered to be inconsistent with the plan of any contiguous city, village, township or region, after considering comments from contiguous communities, and a statement whether the proposed plan is considered to be inconsistent with the county plan; and

WHEREAS the County Board of Commissioners created the Planning Advisory Board to review plans and recommend adoption by the Board of Commissioners; and

WHEREAS the City of Ann Arbor submitted a Downtown Plan Amendment; and

WHEREAS the revisions were reviewed for consistency with the goals, objectives and recommendations of *A Comprehensive Plan for Washtenaw County*; and

WHEREAS the Amendment was reviewed and approved by the Washtenaw County Planning Advisory Board at their June 23, 2008 meeting;

WHEREAS in the interests of following the 40 day comment period as stipulated in the Act the Amendment was forwarded to the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners as a County staff report for review;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Commissioners accepts the staff report from the Washtenaw County Department of Planning and Environment on the City of Ann Arbor Downtown Plan Amendment, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Commissioners directs the County Clerk to send the comments to the City of Ann Arbor and the contiguous local units of government.



Washtenaw County
Department of Planning & Environment

July 3, 2008

DRAFT (revised 6/24)

Wendy Rampson, Systems Planner
City of Ann Arbor
100 North Fifth Avenue
P.O. Box 8647
Ann Arbor, MI 48107-8647

RE: City of Ann Arbor Downtown Plan Amendment

Dear Ms. Rampson:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed amendment to the City of Ann Arbor Downtown Plan. In accordance with the Municipal Planning Act, Public Act 285 of 1931 as amended, the amendment was reviewed by Washtenaw County Planning Advisory Board and the Board of Commissioners. The Washtenaw County Department of Development Services, Department of Parks and Recreation, Road Commission, Department of Public Health, Office of the Drain Commissioner and the Washtenaw Area Transportation Study (WATS) were also given the opportunity to comment on the update.

The City is seeking review and comment on amendments to the Downtown Plan. The amendments are intended to create a policy for public and private investments in the downtown area. Specifically, the plan presents guidelines to address land use, design, parking, pedestrian orientation, and sense of place.

Based on the staff review of the proposed update in the context of the County Plan, it is determined that the amendment is consistent with the County Plan. The proposed amendment is also consistent with the plans of contiguous local units of government.

The following opportunities do not impact consistency with the County Plan yet warrant exploration to improve the document:

- The use of brownfield redevelopment, obsolete property or other financial incentives should be explored to support goals relative to attracting targeted active businesses and encouraging a diversity of housing in the downtown area in a sustainable development approach.
- The use of context sensitive design should be emphasized as identified in County Comprehensive Plan Landscapes Recommendation 1.1: Encourage infill development within urban centers, mixed-use developments and residential developments that provide a variety of housing options – single family, townhouses, apartments and condominiums. New development should be sensitive to the scale and architecture of surrounding properties and natural features, incorporate eyes on the street design and safe pedestrian connections.

- The major core areas identified in the plan include interface areas surrounding them to provide a transition. This transition district should be explored to provide such transition to the South University Core Area, or consider removal of the area as a Core area.
- As identified by WATS, more frequent use of "non-motorized transportation modes" (i.e. inclusive of bicycle and other non-motorized modes) in goals and action strategies and amenities rather than exclusive focus upon pedestrians.
- Incorporation of the Washtenaw County Non-Motorized Plan and Washtenaw County Transit Plan by reference in the Plan as identified by WATS.
- Exploration of language that prioritizes grocery stores and other uses to provide access to healthy foods as an important amenity to downtown residents as identified by the Department of Public Health.

Other opportunities for plan sections are identified in the attached staff report, which provides additional detail and background regarding County comments. WATS and the Washtenaw County Department of Public Health provided additional detailed recommendations which should be reviewed and considered.

On behalf of the Planning Advisory Board and the Board of County Commissioners, I would like to thank you for your contribution to promoting a shared vision for Washtenaw County. If the Department may be of assistance to the City as you work to implement the policies included in your plan, please call me at (734) 222-6809.

Sincerely,

Patricia Denig
Director of Planning Services
Department of Planning and Environment

Attachments
Staff Report

Cc: Ann Arbor Township
Barton Hills Village
Lodi Township
Pittsfield Township
Scio Township



Washtenaw County
Department of Planning & Environment

Staff Report

RE: City of Ann Arbor Downtown Plan Amendment – Washtenaw County Review

Date: June 24, 2008

Background

Washtenaw County Department of Planning and Environment (P&E) received the draft amendments to the Downtown Plan (Plan) from the City of Ann Arbor on May 19, 2008. In accordance with the Municipal Planning Act, Public Act 285 of 1931 as amended, the County is to provide comments to the City, which must include two statements of consistency:

- A statement as to whether, after considering any comments received by contiguous local units of government, the proposed update is consistent with the plan of contiguous communities; and
- A statement as to whether the proposed update is consistent with the County Plan:

Summary of Update/Review in context of County Plan

The City of Ann Arbor is seeking review and comment on amendments to its Downtown Plan. The Downtown Plan was originally adopted in 1988 and updated in 1992 as part of the City's Central Area Plan. The proposed amendment is the result of a renewed focus on downtown development in the early 2000's that was influenced by planning initiatives by the City of Ann Arbor and Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority since 2003.

The plan is concise, and well-organized to provide a user-friendly tool for decision-makers and the various stakeholders that contribute to a vibrant downtown Ann Arbor.

Existing Conditions and Characteristics

The first section, Existing Conditions and Characteristics provides an overview of the fundamental elements of downtown Ann Arbor that create a special sense of place. Historic Building Patterns, Pedestrian/Open Space System, Land Use, Existing Development Densities, and Land Form and Building Scale are some of the categories referenced as contributing to the unique character of the area.

While the plan should be commended for emphasis on pedestrian orientation, the plan could be strengthened in this category by providing some more general transportation system-related characteristics to the downtown. The historic grid-like street pattern is an important amenity to the walkability of downtown areas. The character of streets can also be impacted by the presence of on-street parking, minimum curb cuts, and consolidated loading/service entry through alleyways.

While recommendations regarding these do appear in the document, recognizing how the transportation system in general impacts the character of the downtown might be a worthwhile exercise.

Guiding Values

The next major section of the proposed Plan includes a series of values which are intended to articulate fundamental elements or principles that should be at the forefront of any decision-making process in the downtown area. The values identified include Diversity of Use, Diversity of Users, Pedestrian Orientation, and Sustainability. *These values relate to many County Plan goals and objectives including County Plan Landscapes 1.1 (Urban Infill Development Character and Design and Transportation) Objective 9 (Encouraging pedestrian and other non-motorized connections to educational, work and leisure opportunities).* While not explicitly referenced in County Plan Objectives, the proposed Downtown Plan identifies sustainability as a guiding value which is to be commended.

Areas of Downtown Character

After the introductory portions, the Plan is comprised of a series of goals and recommended action strategies relative to characteristics of the downtown area that are important to a sense of place.

Land Use

- The Plan encourages land use and development that draw people downtown and foster an active street life. This goal is supported by strategies that encourage housing within developments and the inclusion of new pedestrian-oriented uses such as live work units.
- The Plan promotes downtown as the center of commerce in the community and recommends expansion of active uses such as shops, services, restaurants and entertainment attractions. Recommended Action Strategies to support this goal include zoning ordinance amendments that require active uses at street level, streetscape improvement, and a market study to enhance the competitive advantages of downtown retailers.
- Encouraging a diversity of new downtown housing opportunities and an increased downtown population is a goal of the land use section. This goal is supported by strategies that reference zoning updates, premium incentives, the use of DDA funds, the prioritization of housing as a use of publicly-offered land, and a streamlined development proposal process.
- The Plan promotes a mix of office, service and cultural uses in the downtown to complement retail activity. The promotion of incentives to choose alternatives to parking downtown all day, mixed use land plans, and encouraging cultural and arts-oriented uses to located downtown are strategies identified to encourage this balance.
- The Plan supports the private development of a downtown conference/civic center within the core area and goes a step further to investigate the costs and benefits of public funding participation in such an effort. Strategies include the provision of a special exception zoning provision for the use in the core area and to encourage a facility design which can serve local and out of town meeting needs.

- The Plan includes a goal to maintain downtown as a center for government and community service. This goal is supported by recommendations to keep City offices downtown and ongoing dialogue with Washtenaw County on downtown expansion plans.

These goals and action strategies are consistent with County Plan Landscapes 1.1 (Urban Infill), and Economic Development 1.1 (Targeted business/industry support).

Land Use Opportunities:

- *The use of brownfield redevelopment, obsolete property or other financial incentives should be explored to support goals relative to attracting targeted active businesses and encouraging a diversity of housing in the downtown area in a sustainable development approach.*
- *The discussion for the conference/civic center is relatively detailed. The terminology of conference/civic center raises some question and might warrant further clarification or definition (e.g. would a government office campus meet the civic center definition). The recommendation that a conference/civic center contribute to the quality of pedestrian environment is an important reference, as some conference centers do not achieve this integration and are more oriented to a self-contained operation that discourages street activity.*

Development Character

This section of the plan describes two character areas of the downtown area, the Core Area which includes the largest retail areas, greatest concentration of office and civic functions, and major hotels. The second area, the Interface Area can be generally described as those downtown areas that transition from the Core to near-downtown residential neighborhoods. The section also includes other character-related goals that would apply to all areas of the downtown.

- The Plan encourages downtown's highest density and tallest buildings in the Core Area. Recommended Action Strategies include the revision and use of the premium system (e.g. density bonuses in exchange for design elements) to encourage residential development, green building, historic preservation, affordable housing and transferred development rights.
- The Interface Area goal is focused on supporting incremental transitions in land use, density, building scale and height. This is recommended by a maximum 600% floor area ratio, height limitations, use of the Premium System, and shifts in land use from fringe commercial and light industrial to residential and a mix of office, retail and business services.
- The Plan encourages the designation of historic buildings to encourage their preservation. Through collaboration with the Historic District Commission, the development of compatible infill design guidelines, and the potential of a transfer of development rights program to shift development rights from designated properties.
- The Plan supports protecting the livability of residential neighborhoods adjacent to downtown. This is intended to be accomplished through residential zoning

boundary confirmation, expansion of resident parking permit systems, and mitigating traffic impact to residential areas.

- The Plan identifies contextual design as an important element to the downtown as a special place. Articulation in building mass is encouraged to minimize any negative impacts from scale, shading, or blocking views. The creation of overlay districts covering areas of similar character, the development of design guidelines and site specific development area urban design plans for those areas with high potential for growth.

These goals and action strategies are consistent with County Plan Landscapes 1.1(Urban Infill), and Historic Preservation 1.5 (Innovative Preservation Strategies).

Development Character Opportunities:

- *The Core Area discourages "fringe commercial" land uses, which isn't adequately defined.*
- *Brownfield redevelopment incentives and transfer of development rights to preserve open space could be considered as other mechanisms within the premium system to achieve character goals.*
- *The use of context sensitive design should be emphasized as identified in County Comprehensive Plan Landscapes Recommendation 1.1: Encourage infill development within urban centers, mixed-use developments and residential developments that provide a variety of housing options – single family, townhouses, apartments and condominiums. New development should be sensitive to the scale and architecture of surrounding properties and natural features, incorporate eyes on the street design and safe pedestrian connections.*
- *The major core areas identified in the plan include interface areas surrounding them to provide a transition. This transition district should be explored to provide such transition to the South University Core Area, or consider removal of the area as a Core district.*

Pedestrian and Open Space System

The pedestrian character of the downtown area is important to the desired sense of place. The Plan includes several goals relative to maintaining the features that make the area walkable:

- The first goal of the section is to improve and extend pedestrian connections through streetscape improvements. Developing long term funding strategies to maintain the system, as well as coordination with private development to implement desired enhancements, are a few of the strategies identified.
- Development guidelines are also identified as important to maintain pedestrian scale and orientation as new development occurs.
- Open Space in the downtown is supported by goals regarding the development of parks, plazas, through-block arcades and atrium spaces, the rehabilitation/maintenance of existing spaces, and the development of a linked open space system on the floor of the Allen Creek valley.
- Improvement to the downtown's entrance corridor is a goal supported by the effective use of Interface Areas to provide appropriate transitions.

These goals and action strategies are consistent with County Plan Transportation 9.4 (Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure).

Transportation and Parking

The Plan includes several goals regarding the role of transportation and parking to the character and unique aspects of downtown:

- Ensure that traffic increases generated by future growth are accommodated without jeopardy to the pedestrian network. This is recommended to be accomplished through low traffic speeds, maintaining on-street parking, consolidate/limit vehicle access drives, and use operational changes (innovative signalization or other tools rather than street widening) to accommodate increased demand.
- Establish a physical and cultural environment that supports safe, desirable pedestrian and bicycle circulation throughout the downtown. Recommended action strategies to support this goal include the provision of bike and pedestrian routes on both sides of a street, application of design guidelines from the Non-Motorized Transportation Plan, and the provision of adequate parking for bicycles, motorcycles, scooters and the like.
- Improve transit service within the downtown area by adopting policies that enhance the competitiveness of automobile alternatives, support of AATA park and ride lots, encourage businesses and institutions to reduce the number of their employees arriving downtown each day in cars, implement rail service along the Ann Arbor Railroad ROW, and study connections between downtown and proposed commuter rail station.
- Parking is intended to be guided by a set of principles to recognize the role of parking, how parking relates to alternative modes of travel, and the provision of appropriate parking supply.
- Reduce parking pressures on neighborhood streets and discourage encroachment of off street parking into residential neighborhoods.
- Encourage structured parking, with emphasis on underground parking in all major projects. Develop design guidelines to encourage high quality design and function, and encourage public parking as part of large private development projects.

These goals and action strategies are consistent with County Plan Transportation 9.4 (Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure) and Transportation 1.2 (Expand Transit Use for Commuters).

Transportation and Parking Opportunities:

- *The recommendation of public atriums, arcades, and other public spaces might be emphasized in relationship and connectivity to transit stations and/or high volume transit routes.*

Implementation

- Encourage improved cooperation between the City, County, University of Michigan, public schools, and state and federal agencies.
- Streamline the development proposal process.

Implementation Opportunities:

- *There are implementation opportunities throughout the plan. Implementation steps are generally included in action strategies, and the inclusion of a separate section suggests a more limited implementation effort.*
- *The strategy to encourage the University administration to address needs for additional student housing is vague. It is unclear what this strategy is intended to foster.*
- *More explanation of streamlining the development approval process would provide better focus. What are the desired outcomes (e.g. reduced cost, reduced timeframe, fewer steps). More information should be provided on how process mapping and technology improvements might lead to a streamlined process.*

Contiguous Community Land Uses

The Downtown planning area does not share boundaries with any other jurisdictions. Within the City, land uses patterns surrounding the downtown planning area are residential of varying densities and University of Michigan uses.

Contiguous Community Comments

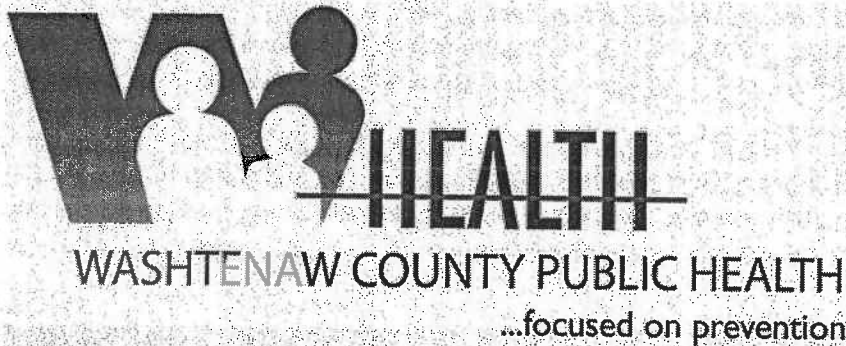
None received.

Applicable County Department Comments

Washtenaw County Public Health: Attached

Washtenaw County Drain Commission (WCDC): None Submitted

Washtenaw Area Transportation Study (WATS): Attached.



**Public Health Checklist for Review / Comment of
Washtenaw County Planning Documents
Ann Arbor Downtown Plan – Draft 5/5/08
Reviewed June 9, 2008 by Adreanne Waller, MPH**

	Not Addressed	Somewhat Addressed	Adequately Addressed	Not Applicable To this review
1. The plan includes elements that increase access to physical activity.				
A. Opportunities for use of non-motorized transportation are evident in the plan (bikeability, walkability, Multi-use paths)	1	3	5	N/A
B. Connectivity between schools and residential areas are promoted in the Plan (Safe Routes to School).	1	3	5	N/A
C. Preservation of green/open	1	3	5	N/A

Space including parks is
Evident in this plan.

Comments: Connectivity between residential areas and downtown addressed; however, connectivity to schools is not addressed.

	Not Addressed	Somewhat Addressed	Adequately Addressed	Not Applicable To this review
2. The plan includes elements that increase access to healthy eating resources.				
A. The plan promotes mixed use development (retail including access to grocery stores and residential).	1	3	5	N/A
B. Grocery stores and super-markets can be accessed by non-motorized transportation.	1	3	5	N/A
C. The plan includes elements that support or improves the local food system (including preservation of agricultural land / urban agriculture and community gardens)	1	3	5	N/A

Comments: _____
While there are numerous references to access to 'retail and restaurants,' there are no mentions of access to healthy foods or resources, with the exception of plans to retain space for farmers market.

Not Addressed	Somewhat Addressed	Adequately Addressed	Not Applicable To this review
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3. The plan includes elements that **promote emotional well-being and social connectivity.**

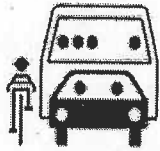
A. The plan includes elements that promote the use of, and access to, public transportation.	1	3	5	N/A
B. The plan includes elements that promote connectivity between residential development and retail.	1	3	5	N/A
C. The plan incorporates affordable housing options into residential developments.	1	3	5	N/A
D. The plan includes built elements that increase community cohesion and neighborhood activities.	1	3	5	N/A

Comments: _____

References:

- 1) Washtenaw County Public Health comments for Environment and Planning Master Plan.
- 2) Design guidelines for Active Michigan Communities, 2006.
- 3) Robert Wood Johnson: Active Living Research
 - a. Designing for Active Recreation: February 2005
 - b. Designing for Active Transportation: February 2005

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WASHTENAW AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

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Planning Reviews

Community: Ann Arbor City **Date Received:** May 15, 2008

Complete Master Plan Update: **Complete Zoning Plan Update:**

Master Plan Amendment: x **Zoning Plan Amendment:**

Other:

Sections reviewed: Goals (objectives) Policies Land Use Recommendations
 Transportation Recommendations Other

General Comments:

The Table of Contents does not list the maps included in the document.

There is little detail of how the conceptual action strategies will be used to accomplish the goals.

Consider a separate goal encouraging intermodal transportation transfers between, non-motorized, vehicular, and transit transportation, by itself and not within the parking section.

Land Use Implications:

The densification of the downtown area is critical for the reduction of future trips and to be able to make transit modes more efficient.

Transportation Component Implications:

Many references of only walking or walkways could be changed to non-motorized transportation and include biking. Consider incorporation of WATS Transit Plan by reference.

POLICY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- CITY OF ANN ARBOR • ANN ARBOR TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY • ANN ARBOR TOWNSHIP • CITY OF CHELSEA • VILLAGE OF DEXTER •
- DEXTER TOWNSHIP • EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY • MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION • NORTHFIELD TOWNSHIP • PITTSFIELD TOWNSHIP •
- CITY OF SALINE • SCIO TOWNSHIP • SOUTHWEST WASHTENAW COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS • SUPERIOR TOWNSHIP • UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN •
- WASHTENAW COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS • WASHTENAW COUNTY ROAD COMMISSION • CITY OF YPSILANTI • YPSILANTI TOWNSHIP •
- EX OFFICIO: FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION • SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS •

AN INTERMUNICIPALITY COMMITTEE ORGANIZED UNDER ACT 200 OF PUBLIC ACTS OF MICHIGAN (1957)
REPRESENTING WASHTENAW COUNTY

Comments by Section:

Page 7 – Guiding Values, Pedestrian Orientation: Consider changing “convenient walking environment” to “convenient non-motorized environment” to include both pedestrians and bikers.

Page 9 – Land Use, Concentrated Diversity of Activity: Second Paragraph, last sentence; Consider changing “on foot” to “on foot and by bike”.

Page 9 – Land Use, Concentrated Diversity of Activity, Recommended Action Strategies, 1: The section that states “more use diversity” should be changed to “more land use diversity” or diversity of activity and modes.

Page 10 – Retail Environment, Goal: Using “pedestrian environment” as a description of non-motorized transportation is adequate in most cases, but since you are referring to transit and parking in the same sentence please change “quality pedestrian environment” to “quality pedestrian environment with bike parking amenities”.

Page 13 – There is not a title or service area listed before the Goal.

Page 14 – Development Character, Core Area: If you refer to map figure 6 there are two distinct Core Areas, not one Core Area. There is the Main St area and the South University Area. Consider changing the figure or changing the section title to Core Areas as the areas are not contiguous.

Page 14 – Development Character, Core Area, Description of Goal: As stated in the previous comment, the three paragraphs that describe the goal of the Core Area does not describe the South University Core Area on figure 6. Consider adding a description specific to the University area or dropping the South University area from the Core Area.

Page 14 – Recommended Strategies, (4) Consider adding “which includes bike, motorcycle and moped parking” to the end of the strategy.

Page 15 – Interface Area – Strategy (5) – This strategy speaks to allowing a mix of office, retail and business service functions but does not speak to “mixed use” within one development. Are you limiting the mixed uses to different developments?

Page 16 – Neighborhood Edges, Recommended Action Strategies, 3: Consider the addition of “automobile” to the strategy to make it clear that you only are hoping to limit auto trips. Also consider being more descriptive with Action Strategy 3. How will you minimize through traffic impacts? Consider adding to the sentence “by using traffic calming facilities such as raised pedestrian crossings, speed humps, etc.”

Page 20 – Development Guidelines, Goal: Consider changing “enhance the pedestrian scale” to “enhance the non-motorized scale”

Page 20 – Development Guidelines, Description of Goal: Consider changing “accommodate pedestrian activity” to “accommodate pedestrian and bike activity”

Page 22 – Allen Creek “Greenway”, Description of Goal: First paragraph, last sentence; Change “linked by walkways.” to “linked by non-motorized paths.” unless the pathways will be limited to walking only.

Page 23 – Transportation and Parking, vehicular Travel, Goal: Change “quality of the pedestrian environment” to “quality of the non-motorized environment”.

Page 23 – Transportation and Parking, vehicular Travel, Description of Goal: Change “objectives for pedestrian” to “objectives for pedestrian and bike”.

Page 23 – Transportation and Parking, vehicular Travel, Recommended Action Strategies, 3: Consider added that limiting access points minimizes conflict between vehicles, bikes and pedestrians and, reduces crashes.

Page 23 – Transportation and Parking, vehicular Travel, Recommended Action Strategies, 4: Consider changing “Encourage shared vehicular” to “Encourage access management techniques for shared vehicular”.

Page 24 – Non-motorized Travel, Description of Goal: Change all “pedestrian” uses to “non-motorized” where appropriate to not leave out considerations for bikes.

Page 24 – Non-motorized Travel: Consider referencing the WATS Non-motorized Plan for Washtenaw County for more specific goals and objectives.

Page 25 – Transit, Description of goal: Third paragraph, first sentence; Only the North-south rail corridor is referenced. Consider added reference to the Norfolk Southern East-west rail line for commuter travel.

Page 25 – Transit, Recommended Action Strategies, 4: Only the North-south rail corridor is referenced. Consider added reference to the East-west rail line for commuter travel.

Page 25 – Transit: Consider referencing the WATS Transit Plan for Washtenaw County for more specific goals and objectives.

Page 28 – Improve Design: Consider changing the title “Improve Design” to “Improve Design of Parking” as it is all that is talked about.

Page 28 – Improve Design, Recommended Action Strategies, 2: Add to the end of the sentence “including ground level retail.”

Page 28 – Consider adding a strategy that speaks more directly to parking for non-motorized modes including bike and moped parking.

