

Downtown Area Citizens Advisory Council Meeting Minutes—November 5, 2013
DDA Office, 150 South Fifth, 3rd Floor

Present: Herb and Jane Kaufer, Jim Kern, Sue Kern, Hugh Sonk, John Chamberlin
Ray Detter

Absent: Kathleen Nolan, Marsha Chamberlin

Guests: Susan Pollay, Christine Crockett

In preparation for tonight's Planning Commission Public Hearing on Revising Downtown Zoning, the CAC, last night, reviewed some mistakes-in current D1 downtown zoning. We base our proposed recommendations for change on the 2009 Downtown Plan goal of encouraging zoning and design approaches which minimize the extend to which high rise developments create negative impacts on neighbors in terms of height, scale, shading, and harm to natural and historic resources and views. We believe the Erin Perdu group has done a good job summarizing the views of this community.

Our First Mistake: The UM Credit Union parking lot adjoining City Hall on East Ann should be D2 (60 feet), not D1 (180 feet). This is clearly an interface area across the street from residential and historic properties in the Old Fourth Ward that need to be protected. We believe that is also true of all the private properties to the west along the south side of Ann. to North 4th. Avenue.

The Second Mistake: The East Huron parking lot area East of Sloan Plaza and west of Campus Inn should not be zoned D1 (150 feet) but should be zoned D2 or some appropriate hybrid, with height less than 120 feet, with diagonal design setback and stepback regulations that bring it to no less than 25 feet from Sloan Plaza. We must prevent a future structure being built that will be destructive of the livability of Sloan Plaza as well as the residential/historic neighborhood of two story houses in the Old Fourth Ward Historic District to the north. The property owner supports this change. If this change is approved, our hired consultants have recommended that it include the entire block and the entire frontage on the north side of East Huron all the way to Ashley.

Although not a charge of the City Council, the Ahmos property on the corner of E. Huron and N. Division as well as the property management office next door should not be D1 (180 feet), but a 120 foot hybrid zoning appropriate to sites next to and across the street from one of the most important historic and residential neighborhoods in the city.

The Third Mistake: The property on the east side of South Main, and south of East William, across from Ashley Mews, should not be zoned D1 (180) feet but D2, or some hybrid zoning including reduced height, stepbacks and diagonal requirements that will protect the Historic District properties on East William as well as the residential and historic houses that line the west side of South Fourth Avenue to Packard. D2 is best.

There are other “mistakes” that need to be looked at: S. Thayer and N. University across Thayer from Hill Auditorium, now zoned D1 (180) feet and next door to a historic residential home, is only one example. All of that block facing S. Thayer should be D2.

The Ann Arbor community wants us to do this. At the same time, as recommended by the current Zoning Study, let’s make sure that we no longer give premiums for things we don’t want in downtown—not to student housing, but do give premiums to those things we do want—more open space, perhaps affordable housing. Let’s follow the lead of the Connecting William Street Study and give no approval and no premiums, to any project that does not follow the recommendations of our Downtown Design Review Board. Also, strengthen the HDC’s commitment to protect historic properties by including one HDC member on the Design Review Board.

If we do this, we will have a vastly improved Downtown Zoning Ordinance and a design review process with teeth that insures that developers will not again insist on a “by right” claim that conflicts with our adopted city plans, policies, ordinances, and expectations.