

May 4th, 2009

City Clerks Office
City of Ann Arbor
100 North Fifth Avenue
Ann Arbor, MI 48107-8647

Subject: Near North development

Dear Councilmembers of the First Ward and members of the Planning Commission,

We would like to express our concerns as residents of Ward 1 in regards to the Near North Project slated for vote by the Planning Commission on Tuesday May 5th. We have lived in this neighborhood as property owners since 1996 and walk this route through our neighborhood on a daily basis. We would like to voice our opposition to this proposed project.

We recognize the need for affordable housing in the City of Ann Arbor and we believe that Avalon Housing is a worthy organization. However, the plan for Near North is a flawed project for many reasons and should be rejected by the Planning Commission and City Council. It is almost inconceivable that the developers plan to incorporate a liquor store in the same project that will house people that are struggling to get back on their feet or recovering from substance abuse. They obviously want to have their cake and eat it too. Can anyone in their right mind think this is a good idea for a low income housing project?

We have read with interest the recommendations of the Calthorpe study and agree with their opinions of keeping the height and density of future projects in the city center. Summit and Main is not the center of the city and the size and scale of Near North is out of keeping with its surroundings. Based upon the size alone it will change the character of this neighborhood and dwarf the surrounding homes on Main Street and Fourth Avenue.

In the past members of City Council, along with our Mayor, have expressed concern with the height of new developments and stressed the need for developments to fit in with the existing buildings in their neighborhood. To approve this development would be to ignore the current zoning ordinances for this area.

It's been stated that this area is the "gateway to the City" meaning "entrance", not center of the city. Just as the beginning of Main Street leads to the downtown, so should buildings increase in size and scale as they near the center of the City. North Main is not

the center of the city but a small neighborhood of 1-2 story dwellings. We can't quite see how a large, out of scale, industrial looking building would lend itself to the small town charm and ambience that the city has wanted to project.

If the City of Ann Arbor is truly committed to affordable housing and believes an affordable housing project of this magnitude should stay downtown why doesn't it consider utilizing one of the many, currently vacant, city center properties it already owns for this purpose. The city could get the additional affordable housing it needs without compromising its own stated development plans and damaging an existing neighborhood. There's the site of the old YMCA, currently a parking lot. The parking lots across from Liberty Lofts, the old city yard on Washington or the lot at Washington and First. All are located in the center of the city and the development would be fitting in terms of size and scale. If the argument against some of these sites is that they are in a flood plane, so is the proposed development.

Clearly this is a flawed project for many reasons. We urge you to not make an irrevocable decision to approve this project. If affordable housing in the form of a development of this magnitude is so important to downtown, then wisely consider placing it in the downtown proper where it belongs.

Respectfully Yours,

Christine + Bob

Christine Schopieray & Robert Kelley
719 Daniel St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

Cc: Sabra Briere
Sandy Smith
Planning Commission