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March 19, 2009

Mayor and Members of City Council:

With respect to the proposed changes to City of Ann Arbor Zoning Ordinances, Chapters 55/57, the Board of the Old West Side Association would draw attention to the following. Your consideration is necessary to take advantage of a unique opportunity. Ann Arbor is on the verge of a unified effort on planned development.

First, thank you for taking up the entire body of work before you which will communicate development priorities and processes. This is needed information for all concerned as your charter to the various efforts confirms.

Second, please recognize that what you enact will shape Ann Arbor for decades. You can probably look back within your own time in town and think of examples of prior planning.... We applaud giving more direction to do better.

As numerous cities but notably Portland in Oregon and in Maine highlight, it is imperative to lay good groundwork for what is desired for downtown development. The zoning proposals before you are a critical leg of the framework for Ann Arbor as witnessed by the time and effort needed to bring a final version to Council.

But, these provisions are not very meaningful in isolation. Some of the other important language has already been recognized, inculcated in ordinance or regulation and implemented. Some are in process whether by staff work or by taskforce such as the recently birthed committee on area, height and placement. Still others are in limbo like the historic district design guidelines. Please be mindful of these other components.

Specifically with respect to the zoning proposals we again recommend three priorities:

1. Cross-reference or symmetry between components so that all are clear on what is intended—that is, the Downtown Plan, Zoning Ordinance and any illustrations should mesh;
2. Transitions or buffers between character areas, residential versus commercial zones, D1 versus D2 versus other zoning, or downtown versus neighborhoods should be preserved where possible; and
3. Qualified consultants such as Race/Winter should be retained to assist in melding the various components of the Ann Arbor development blueprint together in an understandable, useful way whether this entails documents, training, or outreach.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Christine Brummer
Old West Side Association