

Bruce Thomson
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Ann Arbor, MI 48103

CITY OF ANN ARBOR
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April 3, 2009

Dear City Council Members and Mayor:

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter regarding the Zoning and Master Plan for East Huron Street. I would like to applaud the Planning Commission for the enormous amount of time and effort they have put into these plans.

As you may recall, I own the property at 413 East Huron, along with 10 other family members. I would like to briefly review the issues central to that area.

This area has been zoned for intense, commercial development since my Grandfather bought the land 80 years ago. Campus Inn and Sloan Plaza were approved for our block because they were appropriate for that street. New high-rises are going up across the street and at the corner of State Street. Our block is bounded by two of the busiest streets in downtown – Huron and Division. Huron Street is lined with tall, dense buildings.

The current zoning (C2A/R) allows for 660% FAR and no height restriction. Under a D-1 zoning we would look essentially the same. In other words, we are not asking for something new, simply a continuation of the same zoning we have had for decades. Every plan for downtown has included this block in the core district.

The current issue has arisen because a few vocal and politically involved neighbors are seeking to downzone our block. Since half of the block already contains high-rises, the net effect would be a ½ block valley tucked in the middle of the dense Huron corridor. Needless to say, this would have a drastic effect on our property value. More importantly from Council's point of view, this is not good Planning.

We are sympathetic to the concerns of residential neighbors. I have met with them and worked with the Steering Committee and the Planning Commission to come up with compromises that address their concerns while still maintaining the essential elements of a D-1 zoning. The Planning Commission arrived at such a compromise. It requires that any construction remain within 150 feet of Huron Street. Since our parcel is 225 feet deep at its farthest point, this means that our rear setbacks from the neighbors will reach as much as 75 feet. We support this reasonable compromise.

I am attaching a copy of the letter I handed out at the public comment session which goes into more detail about our position. I think the key point is that the Planning Commission has crafted a careful balance of homeowner concerns and property owner rights, and it makes sense to support that plan.

Thank you very much for your time,



Bruce, Linda, Susan, Heather, Ashley, Ryan, Glen & Elizabeth Thomson; Kerry, Michael, Patrick & Kevin Wiesner



BRUCE H. THOMSON
President

Analysis of 413 E. Huron, Ann Arbor, Michigan relative to the 1988 Ann Arbor Downtown Plan and the 1992 Central Area Plan.

The Ann Arbor Downtown Plan was adopted as a part of the City Master Plan in 1988. The Central Area Plan was adopted in 1992.

In Summary:

We do not resemble the proposed Interface areas. We have all of the characteristics of the Core area, which is why we are included in the Core for the Master Plan.

- We are not a Pedestrian or Open Space area.
- We are in an office/hotel/government corridor.
- We are bounded by 2 major traffic arteries – Huron and Division.
- We are surrounded by tall buildings to the east and west.
 - Several tall buildings are under construction within one block
 - We are next door to Sloan Plaza and the Campus Inn – Massive, tall buildings.
- We are within ½-2 blocks of City/County government, high-rises, and hotels.
- We are an opportunity area for removing surface parking and adding density.
- We are zoned C2A/R, the densest zoning, like much of the Core area, and unlike much of the Interface area.
- We have a FAR density more than double the average for the other Interface areas.

We are not asking for something new. We simply want the continuation of our current entitlements. Changing the zoning for this area will require removing it from the Core area in the Master Plan. This is a down-zoning with enormous financial ramifications for the property owners. More importantly from the City's standpoint, this is not good Planning.

Given the small area in question (1 block out of the entire stretch of Huron Street downtown), and given the fact that half of this small area is already built far beyond the proposed specifications (Sloan Plaza and Campus Inn), the net effect is half a block that will be treated differently than the rest of Huron Street. This is plain and simply spot zoning.

For the last 20 years it has made sense to include our site in the Master Plan as a Core area. It still made sense in the Central Area Plan. And it still makes sense today to conform to the City's Master Plan and include this intensely used, high-rise, urban block in the Core area. The very understandable neighborhood concerns should be addressed through the use of design criteria, not a change in zoning.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce Thomson", written over a horizontal line.

Bruce Thomson